



INSIGHTSIAS

SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

INSTA CURRENT AFFAIRS

APRIL 2020

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INSIGHTIAS

GENERAL STUDIES – 1

Topics: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

1. What is Tablighi Jamaat?

What to study?

For Prelims: Key features of the event, its purpose and how is it carried out?

For Mains: What impact has it had on the spread of Corona Virus, how it should have been handled and standard measures to be put in place to monitor such events in future.

Why in News?

Over 200 have tested positive for COVID-19 from among 4,000-odd who had gathered in Delhi's Markaz Nizamuddin, the headquarters of **the Tablighi Jamaat**.

What is Tablighi Jamaat?

Literally, it means a **society for spreading the faith**. It is a **conservative Muslim organisation**.

It is a **Sunni Islamic missionary movement**. The aim is to reach out to ordinary Muslims and revive their faith, particularly in matters of ritual, dress, and personal behaviour.

It has significant base in various countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan, United States, Britain, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

How did the movement begin?

Launched by prominent Islamic scholar **Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Khandhalaw** in 1926 in **Mewat (Haryana)**.

Its roots lie in the **Deobandi version of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence**.

Maulana Ilyas trained several young men from Deoband and Saharanpur and sent them to Mewat, where **the Tablighi Jamaat established a network of madrasas and Mosque**.

The Tablighi Jamaat is based on six principles:

1. **Kalimah**, an article of faith in which the Tabligh accepts that there is no God but Allah and that Prophet Muhammad is his messenger.
2. **Salaat**, or prayer five times daily.
3. **Ilm and dhikr**, the knowledge and remembrance of Allah conducted in sessions in which the congregation listens to preaching by the imam, performs prayers, recites the Quran and reads the Hadith; the congregation also uses these sessions to dine together, thus fostering a sense of community and identity.
4. **Ikram-i-Muslim**, the treatment of fellow Muslims with honour.
5. **Ikhlas-i-niyat**, or sincerity of intention.
6. **Dawat-o-tabligh**, or proselytisation.

Its scope:

It is estimated that the organisation has somewhere between 70-80 million followers across the world, which makes it **the biggest Muslim movement in the world**. In fact, outside of the Hajj, it is believed that its annual meetings in countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, bring together the largest congregations of Muslims.

What's the criticism wrt its functioning?

While the scope of the organisation seems to be limited to spreading the Muslim faith, the group has at times been accused of having ties to radical outfits, who, as per some observers, could take advantage of its loose organisational structure.

Besides, they also don't publish the scope of their activities, their membership or source of their finances, though it is believed they do not rely on donations and are largely financed by their senior members.

Link:

Sources: Indian Express.

2. Who are Nihangs?

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Their origin, how are they different from other sects and their contributions.

Why in News?

Recent Patiala incident in which a group of Nihangs attacked a Punjab police party and chopped off the hand of an assistant sub-inspector when stopped for a curfew pass, and the subsequent seizure of weapons and narcotics, has put the spotlight on the **Nihangs**.

Who is a Nihang?

Nihang is an order of Sikh warriors.

They are characterised by blue robes, antiquated arms such as swords and spears, and decorated turbans surmounted by steel quoits.

What does the word 'Nihang' mean?

Etymologically the word nihang in Persian means an **alligator, sword and pen** but the characteristics of Nihangs seem to stem more from the Sanskrit word nihshank which means **without fear, unblemished, pure, carefree and indifferent to worldly gains and comfort**.

Origin:

Sources trace their origin to **Guru Gobind Singh's younger son, Fateh Singh** (1699-1705), who once appeared in the Guru's presence dressed in a blue chola and blue turban with a dumala (piece of cloth forming a plume). On seeing his son look so majestic, the Guru remarked that it shall be the dress of **Nihangs**, the reckless soldiers of the Khalsa

How were Nihangs different from other Sikhs, and other Sikh warriors?

1. Nihangs observe the Khalsa code of conduct in its strictest sense. They do not profess any allegiance to an earthly master. Instead of saffron they hoist a **blue Nishan Sahib** (flag) atop their shrines.
2. Nihangs use the slogans '**chhardi kala**' (forever in high spirits) and '**tiar bar tiar**' (state of ever preparedness) for unforeseen events.
3. The Nihangs are fond of a popular drink called **shardai or sharbati degh** (sacrament drink) which contains grounded almonds, cardamom seeds, poppy seeds, black pepper, rose petals and melon seeds.
4. When a small measure of cannabis is added to it, it is termed **sukhnidhan** (treasure of comfort).
5. A higher dose of cannabis in it was known as **shaheedi deg**, sacrament of martyrdom. It was taken (while) battling enemies.

What is their role in Sikh history?

- Nihangs had a major role in defending the Sikh panth after the fall of the first Sikh rule (1710-15) when Mughal governors were killing Sikhs, and during the onslaught of Afghan invader **Ahmed Shah Durrani (1748-65)**.
- Nihangs also took control of the religious affairs of the Sikhs at Akal Bunga (now known as Akal Takht) in Amritsar. They did not consider themselves subordinate to any Sikh chief and thus maintained their independent existence.
- Their clout came to an end after the fall of Sikh Empire in 1849 when the British authorities of Punjab appointed a manager (sarbrah) for the administration of the Golden Temple in 1859.



Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is Khalsa code of conduct?
2. Who helped Ahmed Shah Durrani invade India?
3. What is the difference between Shardai, Sukhnidhan and Shaheedi deg?
4. Who was Guru Gobind Singh? His contributions to Sikh community?

Mains Link:

Who are Nihangs? How are they different from other Sikhs, and other Sikh warriors? Discuss.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/nihangs-sikhs-punjab-police-patiala-6361182/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

3. National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of India

What to study?

For Prelims: About UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Indian entries in the list, about Reggae, overview of the National ICH List.

For Mains: Significance of the list and the need for conservation.

Context: Ministry of Culture has launched the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of India.

- The National ICH List is an attempt to recognize the diversity of Indian culture embedded in its intangible heritage.
- This initiative is also a part of the Vision 2024 of the Ministry of Culture.

Elements in the list:

As of now the list has **more than 100 elements**. It also includes the 13 elements of India that have already been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Overview of the National ICH List:

Following UNESCO's 2003 Convention for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, this list has been classified into **five broad domains in which intangible cultural heritage is manifested**:

1. Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
2. Performing arts;
3. Social practices, rituals and festive events;
4. Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
5. Traditional craftsmanship.

About UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage:

The list is made up of those intangible heritage elements that help demonstrate diversity of cultural heritage and raise awareness about its importance.

The list was established in 2008 when Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage came into effect.

UNESCO maintains three lists under its “Intangible Cultural Heritage” banner: the list of intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent safeguarding, the list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity and the register of good safeguarding practices.

Some of the criteria for inclusion in the representative list are if the inscription of the element will ensure visibility and awareness of it and if the element has been nominated after having “the widest possible participation” of the community, group or individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent.

From India the Intangible Cultural Heritages added into this list include:

1. Tradition of Vedic chanting

2. Ramlila, the traditional performance of the Ramayana
3. Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre
4. Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas.
5. Mudiyettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala
6. Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan
7. Chhau dance
8. Buddhist chanting of Ladakh: recitation of sacred Buddhist texts in the trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, Jammu and Kashmir.
9. Sankirtana, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur
10. Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab
11. Yoga
12. Nawrouz
13. Kumbh Mela

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Which are the elements of India that have already been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity?
2. What is UNESCO?
3. Difference between tangible and intangible heritages?
4. Eligibility criteria?
5. Lists under UNESCO “Intangible Cultural Heritage” banner?

Mains Link:

Discuss the significance of UNESCO’s List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Sources: pib.

4. Ambubachi Mela

What to study?

For Prelims: Ambubachi festival and Nilachal Hills.

For Mains: Significance and the role of festival in promoting awareness on menstrual hygiene.

Context: In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the annual **Ambubachi Mela** of Assam has been cancelled this year.

About Ambubachi Mela:

- The festival symbolises **the fertility cult of goddess Kamakhya**.
- There is **no idol in the temple**, the goddess is worshipped in the form of a yoni-like stone over which a natural spring flows.
- Also known as **Siddha Kubjika**, the goddess is a Hindu tantric goddess of desire who evolved in the Himalayan hills. She is also identified as Kali and Maha Tripura.
- The festival is also known as **‘Mahakumbh of the East’** as it draws lakhs of devotees from all over the world.

Social significance of the festival:

The ritualistic fair celebrating the goddess’ period is one of the reasons why the taboo associated with menstruation is less in Assam compared with other parts of India. **The attainment of womanhood of girls in Assam** is celebrated with a ritual called **‘Tuloni Biya’**, meaning small wedding. Ambubachi Mela serves as an occasion **to promote awareness on menstrual hygiene**.

Facts for Prelims:

Kamakhya, atop **Nilachal Hills in Guwahati**, is one of 51 shaktipeeths or seat of Shakti followers, each representing a body part of the Sati, Lord Shiva’s companion.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Where are Nilachal hills located?
2. Location of Shaktipeetas.
3. What is tuloni biya?
4. What is Mahakumbh Mela?
5. Division of Himalayas.

Mains Link:

Discuss the cultural and social significance of Ambubachi mela.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. Basava Jayanti

What to study?

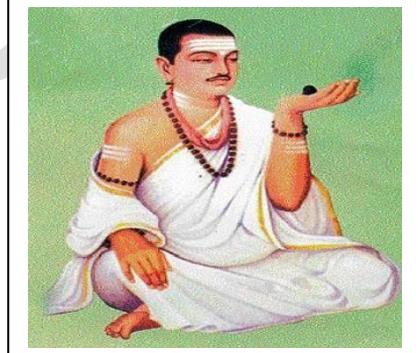
For prelims and mains: contributions of basavanna to Indian Literature and philosophy.

Context: Global Basava Jayanthi – 2020 was observed on 26th April digitally.

Basava Jayanti marks the birth anniversary of Lord Basavanna, the 12th-century poet-philosopher, and the founding saint of the Lingayat faith.

About Basavanna, his thoughts and contributions:

- Basavanna was a 12th-century philosopher, statesman, Kannada poet and a social reformer during the reign of the **Kalachuri-dynasty king Bijjala I in Karnataka, India**.
- Basavanna spread social awareness through his poetry, popularly known as **Vachanaas**.
- Basavanna **rejected gender or social discrimination, superstitions and rituals**.
- He introduced new public institutions such as **the Anubhava Mantapa** (or, the “hall of spiritual experience”), which welcomed men and women from all socio-economic backgrounds to discuss spiritual and mundane questions of life, in open.
- As a leader, he developed and inspired a new devotional movement named **Virashaivas, or “ardent, heroic worshippers of Shiva”**. This movement shared its roots in the ongoing **Tamil Bhakti movement, particularly the Shaiva Nayanars traditions, over the 7th- to 11th-century**.
- Basava championed devotional worship that rejected temple worship and rituals led by Brahmins, and replaced it with personalized direct worship of Shiva through practices such as individually worn icons and symbols like a small linga.
- Basaveshwara is **the first Kannadiga in whose honour a commemorative coin has been minted in recognition of his social reforms**.
- In November 2015, the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi inaugurated the statue of Basaveshwara along the bank of the river Thames at Lambeth in London.



Basavanna and Sharana movement:

1. The Sharana movement he presided over **attracted people from all castes**, and like most strands of the Bhakti movement, produced a corpus of literature, the vachanas, that unveiled the spiritual universe of the Veerashaiva saints.
2. The **egalitarianism of Basavanna's Sharana movement** was too radical for its times.
3. He set up the Anubhava Mandapa, where the Sharanas, drawn from different castes and communities, gathered and engaged in learning and discussions.
4. **Sharanas** challenged the final bastion of the caste order: they organised a wedding where the bridegroom was from a lower caste, and the bride a Brahmin.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is Shramana tradition?
2. What are Vachanas?
3. What is Anubhava Mantapa?
4. Who are Kalachuris?
5. Who are Nayanars?
6. What is Bhakti Movement?

Mains Link:

Write a note on important contributions made by 12th Century reformer Basavanna to the society.

Sources: pib.

6. Raja Ravi Varma

What to study?

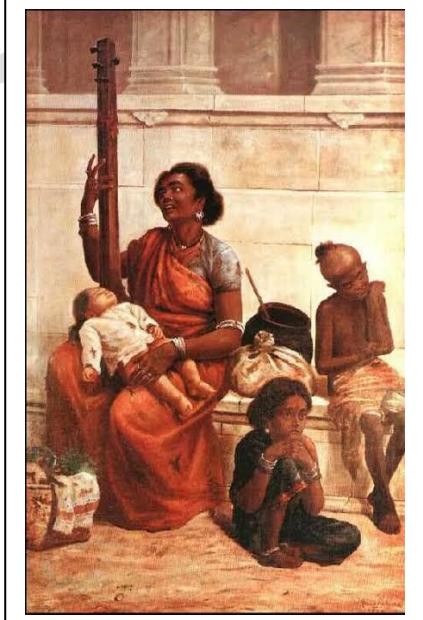
For Prelims: His key contributions to the society and important paintings.

For Mains: Significance and impact of his paintings on the society.

Context: April 29 is the birth anniversary of the famed Indian painter **Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906)**.

Key contributions:

- He is remembered for **giving Indians their western, classical representations of Hindu gods and goddesses**.
- Through his printing press, Varma's humanised depiction of Hindu pantheon travelled beyond the surfaces of costly canvases, and into the prayer and living rooms of working-class homes.
- He achieved this by making affordable lithographs, which were **accessible even to the poor**.
- Ravi Varma first started a press in Mumbai and later shifted it to a place near Lonavala.



Awards he won:

His 1873 painting, **Nair Lady Adorning Her Hair**, won Varma prestigious awards including **Governor's Gold Medal** when it was presented in the Madras Presidency, and Certificate of Merit at an exhibition in Vienna.

In 1904, the British colonial government awarded Varma with **the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal**. In 2013, a crater on the planet Mercury was named in his honour.

His prominent works include:

A Family of Beggars, A Lady Playing Swarbat, Arjuna and Subhadra, Damayanti Talking to a Swan, Jatayu (a bird devotee of Lord Rama), Lady Lost in Thought, Shakuntala.

Criticisms:

Varma is often criticized for being **too showy in his paintings**. His paintings are also condemned for **overshadowing traditional Indian art forms**, especially the ones depicting Hindu gods and goddesses. His approach is said to lack the **dynamism of expression** seen in the traditional paintings. Critics have also criticized him for **modelling goddesses after prostitutes**, saying that his representation of deities have reduced them to the level of mortals.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Time period of Raja Ravi Varma.
2. Important Indian and European rulers during his time.
3. Unique features of his paintings.
4. Awards and titles he won.

Sources: pib.

Topics: The Freedom Struggle – its various stages and important contributors /contributions from different parts of the country.

1. Jallianwala incident

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Jallianwala Bagh incident- overview, impacts and outcomes.

Context: On April 13, 1919, british forces opened fire on unarmed Indians at **Jallianwala Bagh** killing hundreds of people.

About the incident:

April 13, 1919, marked a turning point in the Indian freedom struggle. It was **Baisakhi that day**, a harvest festival popular in Punjab and parts of north India. Local residents in Amritsar decided to hold a meeting that day to discuss and protest against the confinement of **Satya Pal and Saifuddin Kitchlew**, two leaders fighting for Independence, and implementation of **the Rowlatt Act**, which armed the British government with powers to detain any person without trial.

- The crowd had a mix of men, women and children. They all gathered in a park called the Jallianwala Bagh, walled on all sides but for a few small gates, against the orders of the British. The protest was a peaceful one, and the gathering included pilgrims visiting the Golden Temple who were merely passing through the park, and some who had not come to protest.
- While the meeting was on, Brigadier-General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer, who had crept up to the scene wanting to teach the public assembled a lesson, ordered 90 soldiers he had brought with him to the venue to open fire on the crowd. Many tried in vain to scale the walls to escape. Many jumped into the well located inside the park.

Outcomes:

1. Considered '**The Butcher of Amritsar**' in the aftermath of the massacre, **General Dyer was removed from command and exiled to Britain**.
2. **Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi**, as a sign of condemnation, renounced their British Knighthood and Kaiser-i-Hind medal respectively.
3. In 1922, the infamous **Rowlett Act was repealed by the British**.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who was the Viceroy when this incident took place?
2. Outcomes of the incident?
3. What is Rowlatt Act?

Mains Link:

The tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh is a shameful scar on British Indian history. Comment.

Sources: pib.

2. Khudai Khidmatgar

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: About Khudai Khidmatgars and the massacre, implications of the massacre.

Why in News?

Its 90 years for Peshawar's Qissa Khwani Bazaar massacre.

- The massacre was perpetrated by British soldiers against non-violent protesters of the **Khudai Khidmatgar movement** on April 23, 1930.

Who were the Khudai Khidmatgars?

The Khudai Khidmatgar was a **non-violent movement against British occupation of the Indian subcontinent**.

- It was led by **Abdul Ghaffar Khan**, a Pashtun freedom fighter, in the North-West Frontier Province.
- Over time, the movement acquired a more political colour, leading to the British taking notice of its growing prominence in the region.
- Following the arrest of Khan and other leaders in 1929, the movement formally joined the Indian National Congress after they failed to receive support from the All-India Muslim League.
- Members of the Khudai Khidmatgar were organised and the men stood out because of the **bright red shirts** they wore as uniforms, while the women wore black garments.

Why did the Qissa Khwani Bazaar massacre happen?

- Abdul Ghaffar Khan and other leaders of the Khudai Khidmatgar were arrested on April 23, 1930 by British police after he gave a speech at a gathering in the town of Utmanzai in the North-West Frontier Province.
- Khan's arrest spurred protests in neighbouring towns, including Peshawar.
- Protests spilled into the Qissa Khwani Bazaar in Peshawar on the day of Khan's arrest.
- British soldiers entered the market area to disperse crowds that had refused to leave. In response, British army vehicles drove into the crowds, killing several protesters and bystanders.

What was the aftermath of the Qissa Khwani Bazaar massacre?

1. The British ramped up the crackdown on Khudai Khidmatgar leaders and members following the Qissa Khwani Bazaar massacre.
2. In response, the movement began involving young women in its struggle against the British, a decision in line with tactics adopted by revolutionaries across the undivided India. Women were able to move undetected with more ease than men.
3. According to accounts by Khudai Khidmatgar activists, the British subjected members of the movement to harassment, abuse and coercive tactics adopted elsewhere in the subcontinent. This included physical violence and religious persecution. Following the recruitment of women in the movement, the British also engaged in violence, brutality and abuse of women members.

In August 1931, the Khudai Khidmatgar aligned themselves with the Congress party, forcing the British to reduce the violence they were perpetrated on the movement.

Post Independence:

The Khudai Khidmatgar opposed Partition, a stance that many interpreted as the movement not being in favour of the creation of the independent nation of Pakistan. Post 1947, the Khudai Khidmatgar slowly found their political influence decreasing to such an extent that the movement and the massacre 90 years ago in the Qissa Khwani Bazaar has been wiped out from collective memory.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who were called red shirts during the freedom struggle?
2. Contributions of Abdul Ghaffar Khan to the freedom movement.
3. When did Khudai Khidmatgars merged with the Congress party?
4. What was their response to the partition of India?

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/qissa-khwani-bazaar-massacre-khudai-khidmatgars-movement-abdul-ghaffar-khan-6377275/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Women and women related issues.

1. How countries are dealing with the surge in domestic violence under COVID-19 lockdown?

What to study?

For Prelims: Laws in India to deal with domestic violence cases.

For Mains: How is it being managed worldwide under lockdown?

Context: Both the United Nations and the Council of Europe have **expressed concern about the increase in domestic violence in various countries during lockdowns due to the coronavirus.**

Generally, women and children are at greater risk of abuse within their own homes during this period.

How is the situation worldwide since the announcement of lockdown?

- Since the lockdown, in France, the number of domestic violence reports made to the police had gone up by 36 per cent in Paris, and 32 per cent in the rest of the country, including two murders.
- In the UK, since the lockdown started, the National Domestic Abuse helpline saw a 25 per cent rise in calls and online requests for help.
- In the US, where gun sales have been setting record highs during the pandemic, many have expressed an increased sentiment of alarm about the welfare of women and children.
- In India too, the National Commission for Women (NCW) has flagged the issue of a spike in cases of domestic violence since the enforcement of the national lockdown.

How are countries handling the situation?

France:

- Setup EUR 1 million to fund relief organisations working against domestic abuse, to help them cater to the increased number of requests for help.
- Promised to open up pop-up counselling centres and pay for hotel rooms for domestic violence victims.
- Victims have also been encouraged to seek help at pharmacies discreetly.

Italy:

- The government has launched an app that enables domestic violence victims to seek help without making a phone call.
- A proposal to allocate EUR 4 million for shelters for victims is also being considered.

Scotland:

The government announced grants of over GBP 1.5 million for Scottish Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland over six months to ensure that access to support services is maintained.

Protection of women against domestic violence in India:

What is Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005?

1. It is an act to provide for more effective protection of the rights of Women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
2. Domestic Violence Act 2005 is the first significant attempt in India to recognise domestic abuse as a punishable offence, to extend its provisions to those in live-in relationships, and to provide for emergency relief for the victims, in addition to legal recourse. It extends to the whole of India except the State Jammu & Kashmir.
3. It aims to protect women from physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and economic abuse at home.

Besides, in 1983, domestic Violence was recognised as a specific criminal offence by the introduction of **section 498A into the Indian penal code.** This section deals with cruelty by husband or his family towards a married woman.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is Section 498A?
2. Difference between IPC and CrPC?
3. Composition of NCW.
4. Key provisions of the Domestic Violence Act 2005.

Mains Link:

Discuss the key features of the Domestic Violence Act of 2005.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/how-countries-are-dealing-with-the-surge-in-domestic-violence-under-covid-19-lockdown-6350186/>.

Sources:

Topics: Population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues.

1. Global Report on Food Crises

What to study?

For Prelims: Key findings, about the global network.

For Mains: Concerns expressed, ways to address them.

Context: A new edition of the annual **Global Report on Food Crises** has been released by the **Global Network Against Food Crises**.

The report reveals **scope of food crises as COVID-19 poses new risks to vulnerable countries**.

Key findings:

1. At the close of 2019, 135 million people across 55 countries and territories experienced acute food insecurity.
2. Additionally, in 2019, 183 million people were classified in Stressed condition -- at the cusp of acute hunger and at risk of slipping into Crisis or worse if faced with a shock or stressor, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. **Worst hit areas:** More than half (73 million) of the 135 million people covered by the report live in Africa; 43 million live in the Middle East and Asia; 18.5 million live in Latin America and the Caribbean.
4. **The key drivers behind the trends analysed in the report were:** conflict, (the key factor that pushed 77 million people into acute food insecurity), weather extremes (34 million people) and economic turbulence (24 million).

What is Acute food insecurity?

- Acute food insecurity is **when a person's inability to consume adequate food puts their lives or livelihoods in immediate danger**.
- It is more severe than / not the same as chronic hunger, as reported on each year by the **UN's annual State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report**.

Chronic hunger is when a person is unable to consume enough food over an extended period to maintain a normal, active lifestyle.

About the Global Network against Food Crises:

It was launched by the European Union, FAO and WFP during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) to respond to the WHS's call for new approaches to tackle protracted crises and recurrent disasters, reduce vulnerability, and manage risk, by bridging the divide between development and humanitarian partners.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is WFP?
2. Composition and objectives of FAO.
3. EU vs Eurozone.
4. What is World Humanitarian Summit (WHS)?

5. Who Launched Global Network Against Food Crises?

Sources: the Hindu.

2. The Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID 2020)

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Key reasons for displacement, trends and measures needed.

Context: The Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID 2020) has been released by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). The centre is a part of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Key findings:

Displacements in India:

- Nearly five million people were displaced in India in 2019 — the highest in the world so far.
- The displacements in India were prompted by increased hazard intensity, high population and social and economic vulnerability.
- More than 2.6 million people suffered displacement due to the southwest monsoon. **2019 was the seventh warmest year since 1901 in India; its monsoon was the wettest in 25 years.**
- **Eight tropical storms hit in the year** fuelling further destruction. These include **Maha and Bulbul**.
- In addition to displacement due to natural disasters, over 19,000 conflicts and violence also prompted the phenomenon.
- **Unrests and communal violence** triggered displacement in the second half of the year. For example, political and electoral violence, especially in Tripura and West Bengal, led to the displacement of more than 7,600 people.

Global scenario:

1. Globally, around **33.4 million people faced new internal displacements** because of conflicts and disasters in about 145 countries in 2019.
2. Nearly **three-quarters of the global displacements**, accounting for 24.9 million of the total, were **triggered by disasters in 2019**. Out of these, about **95 per cent took place due to weather hazards like storms and floods**.
3. A majority of conflict displacements took place due to armed conflict; communal violence accounted for significant portion of the global total of 8.5 million displacements.
4. **Disaster displacement was recorded in low and high-income countries alike**.
5. Most of the disaster displacements were triggered by **tropical storms and monsoon rains in South Asia and East Asia and Pacific**.
6. Bangladesh, China, India and the Philippines each recorded more than four million displacements in 2019.
7. Conflict continued unabated in countries such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Syria. Violence increased sharply in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.
8. Natural disasters in Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen forced many people, already displaced by conflict, to flee for the second time.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is IDMC?
2. What is Norwegian refugee council?
3. What is the main reason for internal displacement globally?
4. Reasons in India?

Mains Link:

Discuss about the key findings of the recently released Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID 2020).

Link:

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/economy/disasters-conflicts-triggered-5-mln-displacements-in-india-in-2019-70768>.

Sources: down to earth.

Topics: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

1. What is earth's seismic noise?

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Seismic noise- meaning, source, features and effects.

Context: Scientists at the British Geological Survey (BGS) have reported a change in the Earth's seismic noise and vibrations amid the coronavirus lockdown.

- They have observed a **30-50 per cent fall in levels of ambient seismic noise** since schools and businesses were closed in mid-March.
- Seismologists around the world have now begun a **collaborative effort to study the fall in seismic noise levels.**

What is seismic noise?

In geology, seismic noise refers to **the relatively persistent vibration of the ground due to a multitude of causes.**

It is the unwanted component of signals recorded by a seismometer- the scientific instrument that records ground motions, such as those caused by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and explosions.

Causes:

This noise includes vibrations caused due to human activity, such as transport and manufacturing, and makes it difficult for scientists to study seismic data that is more valuable. Apart from geology, seismic noise is also studied in other fields such as oil exploration, hydrology, and earthquake engineering.

How do the reduced noise levels help scientists?

The seismic noise vibrations caused by human activity are of high frequency (between 1-100 Hz), and travel through the Earth's surface layers.

- Usually, to measure seismic activity accurately and reduce the effect of seismic noise, geologists place their detectors 100 metres below the Earth's surface.
- However, since the lockdown, researchers have said that they were able to study natural vibrations even from surface readings, owing to lesser seismic noise.
- Due to lower noise levels, scientists are now hoping that **they would be able to detect smaller earthquakes and tremors that had slipped past their instruments so far.**

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. What are seismic waves?
2. Difference between seismic waves and noise?
3. Difference between body waves and surface waves?
4. What is magnitude scale and intensity scale? How are they measured?
5. Most destructive seismic waves.

Mains Link:

What are seismic noises? How lockdown has brought down these noise levels? Discuss.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-how-coronavirus-lockdown-reduce-seismic-noise-levels-of-the-earth-6358156/>.

2. Ozone Hole

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Ozone layer and hole- factors responsible, effects and how to prevent it, reasons for variations in intensity, about Polar Vortex.

Context: Largest Ozone Hole Ever Recorded over North Pole Has Now 'Healed Itself' and Closed. This was announced by Scientists who were tracking the hole at **Copernicus' Atmospheric Monitoring Service (CAMS)**. The **ozone hole became the largest one ever recorded in the Arctic region** spanning an area of over 620,000 square miles (or 997793.28 kms). It was formed due to unusual climatic conditions.

What caused a hole in the ozone layer?

The cause of the formation of the hole is attributed to the unusual weather at the poles.

The polar vortex has been recorded to be extremely powerful, and **temperatures inside it have been very cold.**

The unique **cocktail of the powerful vortex and low temperatures generates Stratospheric clouds** that react with CFCs and destroy the Ozone layer in the process.

Factors responsible for healing:

According to the scientists the closure of the hole is not due to the reduced pollution levels due to COVID-19 lock down.

The closing was because of a phenomenon called **the polar vortex**.

Ozone and its significance:

The ozone layer is one of the most vital atmospheric components of our planet.

It is responsible for protecting life on Earth from the harmful UV radiation from the Sun.

It is found mainly in the upper atmosphere, an area called the stratosphere, between 10 and 50 km from the earth's surface.

The lack of the Ozone layer can have severe implications for people living directly under it. The most prominent effects are Skin Cancer and other possibly fatal skin diseases.

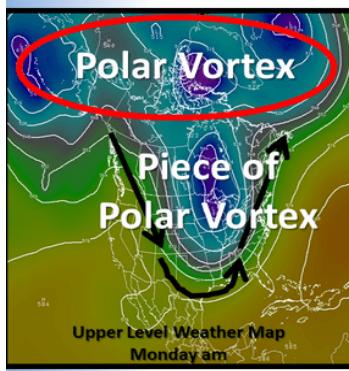
What exactly is a polar vortex?

It is described as a **whirling cone of low pressure over the poles** that is strongest in the winter months due to the increased temperature contrast between the polar regions and the mid-latitudes, such as the US and Europe.

Features:

- The polar vortex **spins in the stratosphere**.
- Usually, when the vortex is strongest, **cold air is less-likely to plunge deep into North America or Europe**. In other words, it forms a wall that protects the mid-latitudes from cold Arctic air.
- But occasionally, **the polar vortex is disrupted and weakens**, due to wave energy propagating upward from the lower atmosphere. When this happens, the stratosphere warms sharply in an event known as sudden stratospheric warming, in just a few days, miles above the Earth's surface.
- **The warming weakens the polar vortex**, shifting its location somewhat south of the pole or, in some instances, 'splitting' the vortex up into 'sister vortices'.

What is the Polar Vortex?



Upper Level Weather Map
Monday am

The Polar Vortex is Not.....

- A persistent, large-scale upper level cyclone near one or both of earths poles.
- It **ALWAYS** exists at the poles, but weakens in summer and strengthens in winter.
- Many times in winter, a piece of the vortex breaks off and is sent southward with the jet stream which is what is happening now.

- is not something new.
- is not something that exists at the earths surface, it is in the upper atmosphere.
- is not something that will be visibly observed like tornadoes, funnel clouds, thunderstorms, lightning etc.
- is not something in itself dangerous to humans, but the cold, arctic air associated with them at the surface could be.

Effects of Polar Vortex:

The split higher up in the atmosphere can give rise to both, **sudden and delayed effects**, much of which involves declining temperatures and extreme winter weather in the eastern US along with northern and western Europe.

A sudden stratospheric warming also leads to a warm Arctic not only in the stratosphere but also in the troposphere as well.

A warmer Arctic, in turn, favours more severe winter weather in the Northern Hemisphere mid-latitudes including the eastern US.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-how-the-ozone-layer-hole-over-arctic-closed-6381835/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

3. IMD releases new list of cyclone names

What to study?

For Prelims: A brief overview of recent cyclones and their origins.

For Mains: Classification and naming of cyclones.

Context: The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** has released a new list of names of tropical cyclones over north Indian Ocean including Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea.

The new list comprises of 169 names including 13 from India such as Gati, Tej, Aag, Neer, Vyom, Jhar, Jaladhi, Murasu, Probaho, Prabhanjan, Ghumi, Ambud and Vega.

The new list starts with Nisarga (shared by Bangladesh), Gati (India), Nivar (Iran).

Background:

Any tropical cyclone that hits the region is known by a name given in the list. Since the earlier list of 2004 is left with only one name - **Amphan** (shared by Thailand), the IMD being one of the six RSMCs in the world to provide tropical cyclone and storm surge advisories finalised the new list of 169 names.

Why name cyclones?

Naming of tropical cyclones (TCs) helps scientific community, disaster managers, media and general masses to identify each individual cyclone; create awareness of its development; remove confusion in case of simultaneous occurrence of TCs over a region; remember a TC easily and rapidly and effectively disseminate warnings to much wider audience.

How are cyclones named?

Each Tropical Cyclone basin in the world has its own rotating list of names.

For cyclones in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea, the naming system was agreed by eight member countries of a group called WMO/ESCAP and took effect in 2004.

Facts for prelims:

WMO/ESCAP Panel Member countries	Column 1		Column 2		Column 3		Column 4	
	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'
Bangladesh	Nisarga	Nisarga	Biparjoy	Biparjoy	Arnab	Omab	Upakul	Upokul
India	Gati	Gati	Tej	Tej	Murasu	Murasu	Aag	Aag
Iran	Nivar	Nivar	Hamoon	Hamoon	Akvan	Akvan	Sepand	Sepand
Maldives	Burevi	Burevi	Midhili	Midhili	Kaani	Kaani	Odi	Odi
Myanmar	Tauktae	Tau'Te	Michaung	Migjaum	Ngamann	Ngaman	Kyarthit	Kjathi
Oman	Yaas	Yass	Re-Mal	Re-Mal	Sail	Sail	Naseem	Naseem
Pakistan	Gulab	Gul-Aab	Asna	As-Na	Sahab	Sa-Hab	Afshan	Af-Shan
Qatar	Shaheen	Shaheen	Dana	Dana	Lulu	Lulu	Mouj	Mouj
Saudi Arabia	Jawad	Jowad	Fengal	Feinjal	Ghazeer	Razeer	Asif	Aasif
Sri Lanka	Asani	Asani	Shakhti	Shakhb	Gigum	Gigum	Gagana	Gagana
Thailand	Sitrang	Si-Trang	Montha	Mon-Tha	Thiyanoyt	Thian-Yot	Bulan	Bu-Lan
United Arab Emirates	Mandous	Man-Dous	Senyar	Sen-Yaar	Afoor	Aa-Foor	Nahhaam	Nah-Haam
Yemen	Mocha	Mokha	Ditwah	Ditwah	Diksam	Diksam	Sira	Sira

Cyclones are given many names in different regions of the world – They are known as **typhoons** in the China Sea and Pacific Ocean; **hurricanes** in the West Indian islands in the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean; **tornados** in the Guinea lands of West Africa and southern USA.; **willy-willies** in north-western Australia and tropical cyclones in the Indian Ocean.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. List of names given by India.
2. What is a cyclone called in different regions?
3. Favourable conditions for a cyclone to occur?
4. How its intensity varies on land?
5. Why eastern coast cyclones are more intense?

Sources: pib.

INSIGHTIAS

GENERAL STUDIES – 2

Topics: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure; Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.

1. What is Article 142?

What to study?

For Prelims: Overview and applicability of Article 142.

For Mains: Need for and significance of these powers for the Supreme Court.

Context: Invoking special powers under **Article 142**, the Supreme Court has deemed all restrictions imposed on people from entering, attending or taking part in court hearings as lawful in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Important observations made by the Court:

1. These restrictions were in tune with the social distancing norms and best public health practices advocated to contain the contagion.
2. Every individual and institution is expected to cooperate in the implementation of measures designed to reduce the transmission of the virus. The scaling down of conventional operations within the precincts of courts is a measure in that direction.
3. **This is not a matter of discretion but of duty.** It is necessary that courts at all levels respond to the call of social distancing and ensure that court premises do not contribute to the spread of virus.

Rationale behind these observations:

Access to justice is fundamental to preserve the rule of law in the democracy envisaged by the Constitution of India.

The challenges occasioned by the outbreak of COVID-19 have to be addressed while preserving **the constitutional commitment to ensuring the delivery of and access to justice to those who seek it.**

However, **public health takes precedence over conventions.**

Guidelines by the Supreme Court:

1. Judiciary would have to improvise and continue to bank heavily on “**videoconferencing technologies**” in the wake of this “unprecedented and extraordinary outbreak of a pandemic”.
2. High Courts should decide the modalities for the temporary transition to the use of videoconferencing technologies in their respective States.
3. District courts in each State would adopt the mode of videoconferencing prescribed by the respective High Courts.
4. Helplines would be set up to receive and rectify technical complaints.
5. The courts should make available videoconferencing facility for litigants who do not have it or appoint an *amicus curiae*.
6. In no case shall evidence be recorded without the mutual consent of both the parties by videoconferencing. If it is necessary to record evidence in a courtroom, the presiding officer shall ensure that appropriate distance is maintained between any two individuals in the court.

What is Article 142?

Article 142 “provide(s) a unique power to the Supreme Court, **to do “complete justice” between the parties**, i.e., where at times law or statute may not provide a remedy, the Court can extend itself to put a quietus to a dispute in a manner which would befit the facts of the case.

Article 142(1) states that “The Supreme Court in the exercise of its jurisdiction may pass such decree or make such order as is necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it, and any decree so passed or order so made shall be enforceable throughout the territory of India in such manner as may be prescribed by or under any law made by Parliament and, until provision in that behalf is so made, in such manner as the President may by order prescribe”.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. Disqualification of MLAs under 10th schedule.
2. Exceptions under the schedule.
3. Examples of invocation of Article 142 by the Supreme Court.
4. Similar powers to High Courts.
5. Original vs Appellate jurisdictions.
6. Judicial review of Speaker's decisions.

Mains Link:

"The Supreme Court's use of its vast powers under the Article 142 has done tremendous good to many deprived sections. However, it is time to institute checks and balances." Discuss.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GQU7AQSNT.1&imageview=0>

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Governor right in ordering floor test: Supreme Court

What to study?

For Prelims: What is it? How is it carried out?

For Mains: Significance and the need for this procedure.

Context: The Supreme Court has upheld Madhya Pradesh Governor Lalji Tandon's March decision asking the then Kamal Nath led-Congress government to prove majority by holding a floor test in the Legislative Assembly after the resignation of 22 Congress MLAs.

Observations made by the Court:

1. In a situation where the governor has reasons to believe that the council of ministers headed by the chief minister has lost the confidence of the House, **constitutional propriety requires that the issue be resolved by calling for a floor test.**
2. The governor in calling for a floor test **cannot be construed to have acted beyond the bounds of constitutional authority.** This means, while directing a trust vote, the Governor should not favour a particular political party.
3. A Governor's power to call for a floor test is **not restricted only before the inception of a State government immediately after elections, but continues throughout its term.**
4. The Governor's requirement to have a trust vote does not "short-circuit" any disqualification proceedings pending before the Speaker. A Governor **need not wait for the Speaker's decision on the resignation of rebel MLAs before calling for a trust vote.**

What is a "floor test"?

A floor test is the determination on the floor of the House (in this case, the Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha) whether the Chief Minister commands the support of the majority of the MLAs.

This can be done by means of a voice vote, or by recording the vote of each MLA in the House. This determination of majority is done in a sitting of the legislature, for which the legislature has to be convened.

How it takes place?

1. This voting process happens in the state's Legislative Assembly or the Lok Sabha at the central level.
2. Technically, the chief minister of a state is appointed by the Governor. The appointed chief minister usually belongs to the single largest party or the coalition which has the 'magic number'. The magic number is the total number of seats required to form a government, or stay in power. It is the half-way mark, plus one. In case of a tie, the Speaker casts the deciding vote.
3. However, at times, a government's majority can be questioned. The leader of the party claiming majority has to move a vote of confidence.

4. If some MLAs remain absent or abstain from voting, the majority is counted on the basis of those present and voting. This effectively reduces the strength of the House and in turn brings down the majority-mark.
5. The voting process can happen orally, with electronic gadgets or a ballot process.
6. The Governor can also ask the Chief Minister to prove his or her majority in the House if the stability of the government comes into question.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. Floor test vs Composite floor test.
2. Majority required to form the govt.
3. Voting during floor test.
4. Appointment of Chief Minister when there is clear majority vs Hung assembly.
5. Can speaker cast his vote?

Mains Link:

Ambiguity in the law on conducting floor tests often lead to abuses and misuses. Comment.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/sc-upholds-governors-decision-asking-kamal-nath-government-to-hold-floor-test/article31328698.ece>

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Basic structure and the Kesavananda Bharati case

What to study?

For Prelims: Background and highlights of the judgment.

For Mains: Significance and relevance of the judgment.

Context: Exactly forty-seven years ago, on April 24, 1973, Chief Justice Sikri and 12 judges of the Supreme Court assembled to deliver the most important judgment in its history. The **case of Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala** had been heard for 68 days, the arguments commencing on October 31, 1972, and ending on March 23, 1973.

By a 7-6 verdict, a 13-judge Constitution Bench ruled that **the 'basic structure' of the Constitution is inviolable, and could not be amended by Parliament**. The basic structure doctrine has since been regarded as a **tenet of Indian constitutional law**.

Background of the case:

All this effort was to answer just one main question: **was the power of Parliament to amend the Constitution unlimited?** In other words, could Parliament alter, amend, abrogate any part of the Constitution even to the extent of taking away all fundamental rights?

- In the early 1970s, the government of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had enacted **major amendments to the Constitution (the 24th, 25th, 26th and 29th) to get over the judgments of the Supreme Court in RC Cooper (1970), Madhavrao Scindia (1970) and the earlier mentioned Golaknath**.
- In RC Cooper, the court had struck down Indira Gandhi's **bank nationalisation policy, and in Madhavrao Scindia it had annulled the abolition of privy purses of former rulers**.
- All the four amendments, as well as the Golaknath judgment, came under challenge in the Kesavananda Bharati case— where relief was sought by the religious figure Swami Kesavananda Bharati against the Kerala government vis-à-vis two state land reform laws.

What constitutes the basic structure?

The Constitutional Bench ruled by a 7-6 verdict that **Parliament should be restrained from altering the 'basic structure' of the Constitution**.

The court held that under **Article 368**, which provides Parliament amending powers, **something must remain of the original Constitution that the new amendment would change**.

The court did not define the 'basic structure', and only listed a few principles — federalism, secularism, democracy — as being its part. Since then, the court has been adding new features to this concept.

'Basic structure' since Kesavananda:

The 'basic structure' doctrine has since been interpreted to include **the supremacy of the Constitution, the rule of law, Independence of the judiciary, doctrine of separation of powers, federalism, secularism, sovereign democratic republic, the parliamentary system of government, the principle of free and fair elections, welfare state, etc.**

What do critics say?

Critics of the doctrine have called it undemocratic, since **unelected judges can strike down a constitutional amendment.**

At the same time, its proponents have hailed the concept as **a safety valve against majoritarianism and authoritarianism.**

Outcomes and implications of the judgment:

If the majority of the Supreme Court had held (as six judges indeed did) that Parliament could alter any part of the Constitution, India would most certainly have degenerated into a totalitarian State or had one-party rule. At any rate, the Constitution would have lost its supremacy.

- **The 39th Amendment** prohibited any challenge to the election of the President, Vice-President, Speaker and Prime Minister, irrespective of the electoral malpractice. This was a clear attempt to nullify the adverse Allahabad High Court ruling against Indira Gandhi.
- **The 41st Amendment** prohibited any case, civil or criminal, being filed against the President, Vice-President, Prime Minister or the Governors, not only during their term of office but forever. Thus, if a person was a governor for just one day, he acquired immunity from any legal proceedings for life.

If Parliament were indeed supreme, these shocking amendments would have become part of the Constitution.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Constitutional amendments under Article 368 and other constitutional amendments.
2. Types of amendments.
3. Key changes introduced by CAA 25, 26, 39 and 41.
4. Different benches of the Supreme Court.
5. Definition and ambit of basic structure.
6. FRs vs DPSPs.

Mains Link:

Discuss the significance of Supreme Court's verdict in Kesavanand Bharati case judgment.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-47-years-of-a-judgment-that-upheld-basic-structure-of-indias-constitution-6379081/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

4. Constitutional Provisions regarding Minority Educational Institutions

What to study?

For Prelims: What are Minority institutions, special rights guaranteed under Constitution and related facts.

For Mains: Significance and implications of the latest judgment.

Context: In a significant judgment, the Supreme Court has ruled that **the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to graduate and postgraduate medical and dental courses, does not violate the rights of minorities under the Constitution.**

Background:

The ruling came on a bunch of petitions originally filed in 2012 by the Christian Medical College, Vellore and others, challenging the notifications for NEET issued by the Medical Council of India (MCI) and the Dental Council of India (DCI).

Petitioners' arguments:

NEET took away the right of the religious and linguistic minority institutions to administer their business, including the right to admit students from the minority community in terms of their own standards.

Observations made by the Court:

1. Rights of the minority institutions under Articles 19(1)(g) and 30 read with Articles 25, 26 and 29(1) do not come in the way of securing transparency and recognition of merits in matter of admissions.
2. State has the right to frame regulatory regime for aided/ unaided minority/private institutions, as mandated by the Constitution. There cannot be any other examination for admitting students.
3. NEET is a regulatory measure that is in the larger national interest.
4. The regulatory measures in no way interfere with the rights to administer the institution by the religious or linguistic minorities.
5. Besides, regulating academics and imposing reasonable restrictions to ensure educational standards, are in national and public interest.

Constitutional Provisions regarding Minority Educational Institutions:

Article 30(1) recognizes linguistic and religious minorities but not those based on race, ethnicity.

- It recognizes the right of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions, in effect recognizing the role educational institutions play in preserving distinct culture.
- A majority community can also establish and administer educational institution but they will not enjoy special rights under Article 30(1)(a).

Special rights enjoyed by religious minority institutions are:

1. Under **Art 30(1)(a)**, MEI enjoy right to education as a Fundamental Right. In case the property is taken over by state, due compensation to be provided to establish institutions elsewhere
2. Under **Article 15(5)**, MEIs are not considered for reservation
3. Under **Right to Education Act**, MEI not required to provide admission to children in the age group of 6-14 years upto 25% of enrolment reserved for economically backward section of society
4. In **St Stephens vs Delhi University case, 1992**, SC ruled that MEIs can have 50% seats reserved for minorities
5. In **TMA Pai & others vs State of Karnataka & others 2002 case**, SC ruled that MEIs can have separate admission process which is fair, transparent and merit based. They can also separate fee structure but should not charge capitation fee.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Various rights available for MEIs.
2. Rights of Minority vs other institutions.
3. Can states interfere in their internal matters?
4. What is NEET?

Mains Link:

Write a note on constitutional rights conferred upon minority educational institutions in India.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/education/neet-applies-to-minority-run-medical-colleges-supreme-court/article31465082.ece>

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

1. J&K domicile rules

What to study?

For Prelims: What is Domicile? Recent changes.

For Mains: Significance and implications of these changes, criticisms surrounding.

Context: Centre redefines **Jammu and Kashmir domicile rules** opening up various categories of jobs in the region to people from across the country.

The order has been defined under **J&K Civil Services (Decentralisation and Recruitment) Act.**

What is domicile?

In law, domicile is the status or attribution of being a lawful permanent resident in a particular jurisdiction.

As per the Changes, who is now deemed to have domicile?

1. Anyone "who has resided for a period of fifteen years in the UT of J&K".
2. Or has studied for a period of seven years and appeared in class 10th/12th examination in an educational institution located in the UT of J&K.
3. Or those registered as migrants and their children.
4. Or the children of those central government officials, All India service officials, Officials of Public sector undertaking, autonomous body of central government, public sector banks, officials of statutory bodies officials of central universities and recognized research institutes of central government who have served in J&K for a period of ten years.
5. Or children of residents of J&K who reside outside the Union Territory in connection with employment or business or for other professional or vocational reasons, but whose parents fulfil any of the conditions provided in the latest gazette notification will also be entitled to domicile status.

What else the order says?

The Order says that the domiciles will be eligible for the purposes of appointment to any post carrying a pay scale of not more than Level 4.

The Level 4 post comprises positions such as gardeners, barbers, office peons and watermen, and the highest rank in the category is that of a junior assistant.

Who can issue domicile certificates?

The orders also empowers tehsildars to issue domicile certificates. The government has been empowered to notify any other officer as the competent authority to issue the certificate.

Implications:

The order now formally allows people from outside J&K to apply for jobs in the UT. While Level IV jobs have been reserved for people with domicile status – as per their definition in the order – other non-gazetted and gazetted jobs have been opened for people from across the country, including people domiciled in J&K.

Background:

Last year, the Parliament had given its nod to the legislation for bifurcating the state, a decision that seeks to redraw the map and future of a region at the centre of a protracted militancy movement.

Earlier, Article 35A associated with the abrogated Article 370 had given the legislative assembly of the state the power to define a Jammu and Kashmir resident.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Definition of domicile?
2. Who issues domicile certificates?
3. What is Article 35A?

Mains Link:

Critically examine the effect of abrogation of Article 370 and Article 35A on the federal fabric of the country.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/govt-jobs-to-be-reserved-only-for-domiciles-of-jk-says-centre/article31224164.ece>

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Autonomous District Councils

What to study?

For Prelims: Autonomous Councils- composition, objectives and functions.

For Mains: Their significance, challenges being faced and scope for reforms.

Context: The COVID-19 pandemic may earn Governor's rule for the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) in Assam.

The State's Governor is **the constitutional head of the BTAD** that falls under the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution** and is administered by the **Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)**.

Background:

Elections were scheduled to be held for the BTC on April 4 but was deferred indefinitely in view of the pandemic. The council's current term expires on April 27.

What are Autonomous District Council?

As per the **Sixth Schedule**, the four states viz. **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram** contain the Tribal Areas which are technically different from the Scheduled Areas.

Though these areas fall within the **executive authority of the state**, provision has been made for the creation of **the District Councils and regional councils for the exercise of the certain legislative and judicial powers**. Each district is **an autonomous district** and Governor can modify / divide the boundaries of the said Tribal areas by notification.

The Governor may, by public notification:

- (a) Include any area.
- (b) exclude any area.
- (c) create a new autonomous district.
- (d) increase the area of any autonomous district.
- (e) diminish the area of any autonomous district.
- (f) alter the name of any autonomous district.
- (g) define the boundaries of any autonomous district.

Constitution of District Councils and Regional Councils:

- (1) There shall be a District Council for each autonomous district consisting of not more than thirty members, of whom not more than four persons shall be nominated by the Governor and the rest shall be elected on the basis of adult suffrage.
- (2) There shall be a separate Regional Council for each area constituted an autonomous region.
- (3) Each District Council and each Regional Council shall be a body corporate by the name respectively of the District Council of (name of district) and the Regional Council of (name of region), shall have perpetual succession and a common seal and shall by the said name sue and be sued.

Related- 125th amendment bill:

1. It seeks to increase the financial and executive powers of the 10 Autonomous Councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of the northeastern region.
2. The amendments provide for elected village municipal councils, ensuring democracy at the grassroot level.

3. **Powers:** The village councils will be empowered to prepare plans for economic development and social justice including those related to agriculture, land improvement, implementation of land reforms, minor irrigation, water management, animal husbandry, rural electrification, small scale industries and social forestry.
4. **The Finance Commission** will be mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to them.
5. **Finance:** The Autonomous Councils now depend on grants from Central ministries and the State government for specific projects.
6. **Reservations:** At least one-third of the seats will be reserved for women in the village and municipal councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura after the amendment is approved.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is an autonomous district council?
2. Who constitutes them?
3. Powers and roles?
4. What are regional councils?
5. Composition of these councils?
6. How many states are covered under 6th schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GF07CGDNT.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

1. National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)

What to study?

For Prelims: NALSA- composition, establishment, functions and reports.

For Mains: Need for and significance, challenges present and measures needed to make them more effective.

Context: The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) has said that around 11,077 undertrials have been released from prisons nationwide as part of the mission to decongest jails following the COVID-19 pandemic. NALSA has also been providing **assistance to prisoners who were eligible to be released on parole or interim bail under the relaxed norms, through its panel lawyers.**

About NALSA:

NALSA has been constituted under the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**, to provide free legal services to weaker sections of society.

The aim is **to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reasons of economic or other disabilities.**

'Nyaya Deep' is the official newsletter of NALSA.

Composition:

As per **section 3(2) of Legal Service Authorities Act**, the Chief Justice of India shall be the Patron-in-Chief.

Second senior-most judge of Supreme Court of India is the **Executive-Chairman**.

Important functions performed by NALSA:

- Organise Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes.
- Identify specific categories of the marginalised and excluded groups and formulates various schemes for the implementation of preventive and strategic legal service programmes.
- Provide free legal aid in civil and criminal matters for the poor and marginalised people who cannot afford the services of a lawyer in any court or tribunal.

State and district legal services authorities:

In every State, State Legal Services Authority has been constituted to give effect to the policies and directions of the NALSA and to give free legal services to the people and conduct Lok Adalats in the State. **The State Legal Services Authority is headed** by Hon'ble the Chief Justice of the respective High Court who is the Patron-in-Chief of the State Legal Services Authority.

In every District, District Legal Services Authority has been constituted to implement Legal Services Programmes in the District. The District Legal Services Authority is situated in the District Courts Complex in every District and **chaired by the District Judge of the respective district**.

Need- Constitutional basis:

Article 39A of the Constitution of India provides that State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disability.

Articles 14 and 22(1) also make it obligatory for the State to ensure equality before law and a legal system which promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity to all. Legal aid strives to ensure that constitutional pledge is fulfilled in its letter and spirit and equal justice is made available to the poor, downtrodden and weaker sections of the society.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who appoints Patron-in-Chief and executive chairman of NALSA?
2. Eligibility criteria?
3. Who heads state and district legal services authorities?
4. Constitutional provisions in this regard?

Mains Link:

Discuss the roles and functions of NALSA in ensuring free legal aid to the poor and needy.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/11077-undertrials-freed-to-decongest-jails-following-covid-19-nalsa/article31350752.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. No 100% quota for tribal teachers: SC

What to study?

For Prelims: Constitutional provisions on reservations.

For Mains: Significance and implications of the Supreme Court verdict.

Context: The Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has held it **unconstitutional to provide 100% reservation for tribal teachers in schools located in Scheduled Areas across the country**.

What's the issue?

The case stemmed from a legal challenge to a January 10, 2000 order issued by the erstwhile State of Andhra Pradesh Bench providing 100% reservation to the Scheduled Tribe candidates, out of whom 33.1/3% shall be women, for the post of teachers in schools located in the Scheduled Areas of the State.

What has the Court said?

1. 100% reservation is not permissible under the Constitution as the outer limit is 50% as specified in **Indra Sawhney case, 1992**.
2. The citizens have equal rights and the total exclusion of others by creating an opportunity for one class is not contemplated by the Constitution.
3. It also deprives SCs and OBCs of their due representation.

4. **The opportunity of public employment** cannot be denied unjustly to the incumbents and it is **not the prerogative of few**.

Which rights are affected?

1. Equality of opportunity and pursuit of choice under **Article 51A cannot be deprived of unjustly and arbitrarily**.
2. It is arbitrary and violative of provisions of **Articles 14 (equality before law), 15(1) (discrimination against citizens) and 16 (equal opportunity) of the Constitution**.
3. It also impinges upon **the right of open category** because only STs will fill all the vacant posts leaving SCs and OBCs far behind.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/no-100-quota-for-tribal-teachers-supreme-court/article31409071.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

1. Article 164(4) of the Indian Constitution

What to study?

For Prelims: Overview of Articles 164 and 171, Section 151A of RPA.

For Mains: Options before the incumbent CM and legal hurdles.

What's the issue?

Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray may end up losing his seat if he is not elected to the Legislative Council of the state before May 24th.

- He took the oath of his office on November 28, 2019 without being a member of either the State legislature or council.
- But, he will have to get elected to either of the houses of the state legislature before May 24, as **Article 164(4) of the Constitution stipulates**.
- However, the Election Commission has already postponed Rajya Sabha polls, byelections and civic body elections in the wake of Covid 19 pandemic.

What does the Constitution say?

Article 164 of the Constitution allows a non-legislator to occupy a post in the council of ministers, including the office of the chief minister for **six months**.

What's the alternative available now?

Article 171 of the Constitution says the governor can nominate eminent persons from the field of literature, science, art, cooperative movement and social service.

Uddhav Thackeray does not directly fit into any of the criteria mentioned but **social service has a wider scope**. And, if governor nominates somebody to the legislative council, his/her decision cannot be challenged in the court, at least as of the precedent right now.

The Maharashtra legislative council has two vacancies to be filled by governor's nominations.

Then, what is the problem now?

There are some **legal hurdles**.

Section 151A of Representation of the People Act 1951 puts a bar on the governor's discretionary power to nominate a person to the legislative council.

It says election or nomination to vacant seats in the legislative council cannot be done "**if the remainder of the term of a member in relation to a vacancy is less than one year**".

The tenure of the two vacancies that arose on the account of resignations by members recently ends in June. So, **the remainder of the term is less than a year**.

So, what next?

Uddhav Thackeray cannot continue unless elected to any of the houses of Maharashtra legislature after May 28.

Technically, he can be reappointed as the Maharashtra chief minister again after he resigns on May 27 or 28 and takes oath afresh.

But, if Uddhav decides to resign and takes oath afresh, there could be another obstacle. This relates to a case in Punjab, where Tej Parkash Singh of the Congress was appointed a minister in 1995 and was reappointed at the expiry of six months' period in 1996 without getting elected to state assembly.

Litigation followed. And, in 2001, **the Supreme Court declared the resign-and-reappoint bid as "improper, undemocratic, invalid and unconstitutional".**

This judgment did not have a bearing on Tej Parkash Singh but may come in the way of Uddhav Thackeray if he takes the same route.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. How are MLCs elected?
2. How many members can be nominated by the governor?
3. Can a person become a minister without being a member of the legislature?
4. What does section 151A of RPA say in this?
5. Can governor's decision wrt Article 164(4) be questioned in the Court of law?

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/constitutional-crisis-looms-for-uddhav-thackeray-amid-corona-crisis-6374796/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

1. Price Monitoring & Resource Unit (PMRU)

What to study?

For Prelims: About PMRU and NPPA.

For Mains: Key functions and Significance of PMRUs.

Context: Jammu & Kashmir Union Territory has become the **12th State where the Price Monitoring & Resource Unit (PMRU) has been set up by National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA).**

Where else has NPPA setup PMRUs?

Kerala, Odisha, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Nagaland, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Mizoram.

What is a Price Monitoring & Resource Unit (PMRU)?

It is a **registered society** and shall function under the direct control and supervision of State Drug Controller of respective states.

The unit shall be **funded by NPPA** for its recurring and non-recurring expenses.

Functions:

1. Help NPPA and State Drug Controller in ensuring availability and accessibility of medicines at affordable prices.
2. Organise seminars, training programs and other information, education and communication (IEC) activities in the areas of availability and affordability of medicines for all.
3. Collect samples of medicines, collect and analyse data and make reports with respect to availability and over-pricing of medicines for taking action under the provisions of Drug Price Control Order (DPCO).

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who can set up PMRUs?
2. Role of states in setting up of PMRUs.
3. Functions of NPPA in context of DPCO regulation.

Mains Link:

Discuss the role and functions of Price Monitoring & Resource Unit (PMRU).

Sources: pib.

2. National Wildlife Board

What to study?

For Prelims: NBW- composition, objectives and functions.

For Mains: Environmental concern associated with the project and measures to address them.

Context: National Wildlife Board issues final nod for Mumbai-Nagpur highway amid lockdown.

The approval was given via **video-conferencing**.

Background:

The 701-km Hindu Hruday Samrat Balasaheb Thackeray Maharashtra Samruddhi Mahamarg connecting Mumbai and Nagpur covering 10 districts, 26 talukas and 392 villages, will reduce the existing travel time of 15 hours to eight hours.

The project will require felling of over one lakh trees and passes through the 10-km **eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of Katepurna and Karanja Sohal Blackbuck wildlife sanctuaries** towards one end of the state while cutting through the **ESZ of Tansa lake sanctuary closer to the Mumbai Metropolitan Region**.

About National Board for Wildlife:

It is a **“Statutory Organization”** constituted under **the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.

Roles and functions:

- Its role is **“advisory”** in nature and advises the Central Government on framing policies and measures for conservation of wildlife in the country.
- Primary function of the Board is to promote the conservation and development of wildlife and forests.
- It has power to review all wildlife-related matters and approve projects in and around national parks and sanctuaries.
- No alteration of boundaries in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries can be done without approval of the NBWL.

Composition:

The NBWL is chaired by the Prime Minister. It has 47 members including the Prime Minister. Among these, 19 members are ex-officio members. Other members include three Members of Parliament (two from Lok Sabha and one from Rajya Sabha), five NGOs and 10 eminent ecologists, conservationists and environmentalists.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. Chairpersons and other members of NBW.
2. Various such bodies headed by PM.
3. Difference between National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries,

Sources: pib.

3. Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC)

What to study?

For Prelims: CVC- eligibility, appointment and removal.

For Mains: Corruption- issues, challenges and ways to prevent.

Context: Sanjay Kothari appointed as Central Vigilance Commissioner by President.

About CVC:

It is the apex vigilance institution **created via executive resolution (based on the recommendations of Santhanam committee) in 1964** but was **conferred with statutory status in 2003**.

It submits its report to the President of India.

The Commission was set up on the recommendation of the **K.Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption**.

Composition:

Consists of **central vigilance commissioner along with 2 vigilance commissioners**.

Appointment:

They are **appointed by the President of India on the recommendations of a committee** consisting of Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (if there is no LoP then the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha).

Term:

Their term is 4 years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.

Removal:

The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office **only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehavior or incapacity after** the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President, has, on inquiry, reported that the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner, as the case may be, ought to be removed.

Sources: pib.

Topics: *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

1. Punjab Village and Small Towns Act

What to study?

For Prelims: Overview and key provisions of the law.

For Mains: Criticisms surrounding and ways to address them.

Why in News?

This British-era law was recently invoked in Panchkula to curtail movement during lockdown.

Deputy Commissioner of Panchkula has passed an order **under section 3 of this Act** and has declared that all able-bodied male inhabitants of the villages be liable to be on patrol duty both during the day and night.

The aim of the patrol in the present case is to keep a watch on people entering villages without a valid pass and to make sure villagers follow social distancing norms.

What is the law?

The law was first enacted in 1918 in erstwhile Punjab to make provisions for nightly patrol duty by inhabitants of small villages and towns in cases of emergency.

Implementation:

Under this Act, if the **Deputy Commissioner of a district in Punjab or Haryana** is of the opinion that in a village, special measures need to be taken to secure public safety, he has the power to make an order requiring **all “able-bodied adult male inhabitants” to patrol the village.**

The time period of the applicability of the order is up to the Deputy Commissioner and the maximum time period is up to one year.

The Deputy Commissioner shall have power to alter the number of persons required for patrol duty and the method of their selection, and shall inform the village panchayat of his decision.

Penalty and punishment:

Those who do not follow the provisions will be liable under **sections 9 and 11 of the Act**, which means they may have to pay a fine imposed by the village panchayat or a fine imposed by the deputy commissioner, not exceeding Rs 100.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/british-era-law-invoked-in-panchkula-to-curtail-movement-during-lockdown-coronavirus-6340886/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. Counter cyclical capital buffer (CCyB) for banks

What to study?

For Prelims: Meaning of CCyB, about Basel Norms.

For Mains: Need for these measures and their significance.

Context: Reserve Bank has deferred implementation of **countercyclical capital buffers (CCyB)** and extended the realisation period for export proceeds.

Background:

The RBI had put in place the framework on counter-cyclical capital buffer (CCyB) on February 5, 2015, wherein it was advised that the CCyB would be activated as and when the circumstances warranted.

What Is a Countercyclical Capital Buffer (CCyB) in Banking?

The countercyclical capital buffer is intended to protect the banking sector against losses that could be caused by cyclical systemic risks increasing in the economy.

- Countercyclical capital buffers require banks to hold capital at times when credit is growing rapidly so that the buffer can be reduced if the financial cycle turns down or the economic and financial environment becomes substantially worse.
- Banks can use the capital buffers they have built up during the growth phase of the financial cycle to cover losses that may arise during periods of stress and to continue supplying credit to the real economy.

Background:

The rule was first introduced in **Basel III** as an extension of another buffer (called the capital conservation buffer). Basel III is a voluntary set of measures agreed upon by central banks all around the world. These measures were drafted by the Bank of International Settlements' Basel Committee on Banking Supervision in response to the financial crisis of 2007-09, in order to strengthen regulation of banks and fight risks within the financial system.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. What are Basel norms?
2. Capital conservation buffer vs Countercyclical Capital Buffer (CCyB).

Mains Link:

Write a note on Basel norms and their significance.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/rbi-relaxes-export-rules-allows-states-and-uts-to-borrow-more/article31230240.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. What is the National Security Act?

What to study?

For Prelims: Key features of the act.

For Mains: Criticisms and concerns over its misuse, need for review.

Context: The Uttar Pradesh government has said that six persons associated with the Tablighi Jamaat who have been accused of misbehaving with women staff at the district hospital in Ghaziabad will be charged under **the National Security Act (NSA)**.

About National Security Act, 1980:

It allows **preventive detention for months**, if authorities are satisfied that a person is a threat to national security or law and order.

The person **does not need to be charged during this period of detention**.

The goal is **to prevent the individual from committing a crime**.

It was promulgated on September 23, 1980, during the Indira Gandhi government.

As per the National Security Act, the grounds for preventive detention of a person include:

1. acting in any manner prejudicial to the defence of India, the relations of India with foreign powers, or the security of India.
2. regulating the continued presence of any foreigner in India or with a view to making arrangements for his expulsion from India.
3. preventing them from acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of the State or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the community it is necessary so to do.

What the Constitution says?

Article 22 (3) (b) of the Constitution allows for preventive detention and restriction on personal liberty for reasons of state security and public order.

Article 22(4) states that no law providing for preventive detention shall authorise the detention of a person for a longer period than three months unless: **An Advisory Board reports sufficient cause for extended detention**. The 44th Amendment Act of 1978 has reduced the period of detention without obtaining the opinion of an advisory board from three to two months. However, this provision has not yet been brought into force, hence, the original period of three months still continues.

Duration:

Under the National Security Act, an individual can be detained without a charge for up to 12 months; the state government needs to be intimated that a person has been detained under the NSA.

A person detained under the National Security Act can be held for 10 days without being told the charges against them.

Appeal: The detained person can appeal before a high court advisory board but they are not allowed a lawyer during the trial.

Criticisms:

The NSA has repeatedly come under criticism for the way it is used by the police.

As per a Law Commission report from 2001, more than 14 lakh people (14,57,779) were held under preventive laws in India.

How Is It Draconian?

Typically, if a person is arrested, then he/she enjoys certain rights bestowed by the Indian Constitution. The person has to be informed of the reason for the arrest. Under Section 50 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), the person arrested has to be informed.

- However, in the case of the NSA, the person can be held up to ten days without being informed of the reason.
- Sections 56 and 76 of the same penal code guarantee the detained person to be produced before a court within 24 hours. Apart from this, Article 22(1) of the Constitution allows the detainee to seek legal advice from a legal practitioner. However, under the NSA, none of these above mentioned basic rights is permitted to the suspect.

Insta links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who can invoke NSA?
2. Appeals against preventive detention?
3. Right to be informed the reason for arrest under this?
4. Applicability of Constitutional rights in this regard.
5. The writs under the constitution.

Mains Link:

What is the National security act? Why is it termed as a draconian law? Discuss.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GHD7AJ050.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. MPLADS suspended

What to study?

For Prelims: Key facts on MPLADS.

For Mains: Significance, performance analysis and need for monitoring of the scheme, demand for a legal framework.

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved a 30% cut in the salaries of all Members of Parliament and a two-year suspension of the MP Local Area Development (MPLAD) scheme so that the amount saved can go to the Consolidated Fund of India to fight COVID-19.

In this regard, it approved an ordinance to amend the Salaries, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954, to cut the salaries of MPs by 30%.

Now, the consolidated amount of MPLAD Funds for 2 years – Rs 7,900 crores – will go to the Consolidated Fund of India.

About MPLAD scheme:

What is it?

It was launched in December, 1993, to provide a mechanism for the Members of Parliament to recommend works of developmental nature for creation of durable community assets and for provision of basic facilities including community infrastructure, based on locally felt needs.

- The MPLADS is a Plan Scheme fully funded by Government of India. The annual MPLADS fund entitlement per MP constituency is Rs. 5 crore.

Special focus:

- MPs are to recommend every year, works costing at least 15 per cent of the MPLADS entitlement for the year for areas inhabited by Scheduled Caste population and 7.5 per cent for areas inhabited by S.T. population.
- In order to encourage trusts and societies for the betterment of tribal people, a ceiling of Rs. 75 lakh is stipulated for building assets by trusts and societies subject to conditions prescribed in the scheme guidelines.

Works under the scheme:

Works, developmental in nature, based on locally felt needs and always available for the use of the public at large, are eligible under the scheme. Preference under the scheme is given to works relating to national priorities, such as provision of drinking water, public health, education, sanitation, roads, etc.

Release of Funds:

- Funds are released in the form of **grants in-aid** directly to the district authorities.
- The funds released under the scheme are **non-lapsable**.
- The liability of funds not released in a particular year is carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.

Execution of works:

The MPs have a **recommendatory role under the scheme**. They recommend their choice of works to the concerned district authorities who implement these works by following the established procedures of the concerned state government.

The district authority is empowered to examine the eligibility of works sanction funds and select the implementing agencies, prioritise works, supervise overall execution, and monitor the scheme at the ground level.

Recommendation of works:

1. The Lok Sabha Members can recommend works in their respective constituencies.
2. The elected members of the Rajya Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the state from which they are elected.
3. Nominated members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha may select works for implementation anywhere in the country.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. How is MPLADS connected to Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana?
2. Where can nominated MPs recommend their works?
3. Is there any special focus on SC and ST Welfare?
4. Difference between grants and loans?
5. Implementing agencies.

Mains Link:

Critically examine whether MPLADS has helped in bridging the gaps in provisioning of public services?

Sources: pib.

5. PCPNDT Act

What to study?

For prelims: key features of the act.

For mains: performance and efficacy of the act and what else needs to be done?

Context: MoHFW has clarified that it has not suspended the PC&PNDT Act, which prohibits sex selection before or after conception.

What's the issue?

- In view of the ongoing lockdown, due to COVID19 pandemic, the Health Ministry has issued a Notification dated April 4, 2020 to defer/suspend certain provisions under the PC&PNDT Rules 1996.
- These Rules pertain to applying for renewal of registration if falling due in this period, submission of reports by diagnostics centres by 5th day of the following month and submission of quarterly progress report (QPR) by the States/UTs.

But, a section of the media is speculating that the PC&PNDT (Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection)) Act 1994 has been suspended by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

About PCPNDT Act:

The **Pre-conception & Pre-natal Diagnostics Techniques (PC & PNDT) Act, 1994** was enacted in response to the decline in Sex ratio in India, which deteriorated from 972 in 1901 to 927 in 1991.

The main purpose of enacting the act is to ban the use of sex selection techniques before or after conception and prevent the misuse of prenatal diagnostic technique for sex selective abortion.

Offences under this act include conducting or helping in the conduct of prenatal diagnostic technique in the unregistered units, sex selection on a man or woman, conducting PND test for any purpose other than the one mentioned in the act, sale, distribution, supply, renting etc. of any ultra sound machine or any other equipment capable of detecting sex of the foetus.

Amendments:

1. The act was amended in 2003 to improve the regulation of the technology used in sex selection.
2. The Act was amended to bring the technique of pre conception sex selection and ultrasound technique within the ambit of the act.
3. The amendment also empowered the central supervisory board and state level supervisory board was constituted.

Main provisions in the act are:

1. The Act provides for the prohibition of sex selection, before or after conception.
2. It regulates the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques, like ultrasound and amniocentesis by allowing them their use only to detect few cases.
3. No laboratory or centre or clinic will conduct any test including ultrasonography for the purpose of determining the sex of the foetus.
4. No person, including the one who is conducting the procedure as per the law, will communicate the sex of the foetus to the pregnant woman or her relatives by words, signs or any other method.
5. Any person who puts an advertisement for pre-natal and pre-conception sex determination facilities in the form of a notice, circular, label, wrapper or any document, or advertises through interior or other media in electronic or print form or engages in any visible representation made by means of hoarding, wall painting, signal, light, sound, smoke or gas, can be imprisoned for up to three years and fined Rs. 10,000.
6. The Act mandates compulsory registration of all diagnostic laboratories, all genetic counselling centres, genetic laboratories, genetic clinics and ultrasound clinics.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. What is banned under PCPNDT Act.
2. What changes were introduced through the 2003 Amendments.
3. Implementation of the act.

Mains Link:

Discuss the features and significance of PC&PNDT Act.

Sources: pib.

6. Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020

What to study?

For Prelims: Key provisions and IPC sections applicable, overview of epidemics act.

For Mains: Need for and significance of this ordinance, challenges ahead.

Context: The Odisha government has promulgated an ordinance to deal with COVID 19 spread by amending **Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.**

Overview of the Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020:

1. Anyone who disobeys any regulation or order made under the Act, is liable for imprisonment up to two years or with a fine of up to Rs 10,000 or with both.
2. All offences under the Act shall be cognisable and bailable.
3. Any person disobeying any regulation or order made under the 1897 Act was deemed to have committed an offence punishable under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), under Section 3 of the Act.
4. A provision has also been made in the Ordinance for special procurement of critical drugs and consumables to manage the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak.

Odisha's department of health and family welfare has also framed regulations which have two provisions:

1. Not wearing a mask in public place shall be considered as an offence.
2. The penalty for the first three instances has been kept at Rs 200 while for offences beyond that, the penalty shall be Rs 500 for each offence in the state.

What is Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897?

It is routinely enforced across the country for dealing with outbreaks of diseases such as swine flu, dengue, and cholera.

It was introduced by colonial government **to tackle the epidemic of bubonic plague that had spread in the erstwhile Bombay Presidency in the 1890s.**

Why was this act criticised?

Historians have criticised the Act for its **potential for abuse.**

Using powers conferred by the Act, colonies authorities would search suspected plague cases in homes and among passengers, with forcible segregations, evacuations, and demolitions of infected places.

In 1897, **the year the law was enforced, freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak** was punished with 18 months' rigorous imprisonment after his newspapers **Kesari** and **Mahratta** admonished imperial authorities for their handling of the plague epidemic.

Provisions of the 1897 Epidemic Diseases Act:

1. It empowers **state governments/UTs to take special measures and formulate regulations for containing the outbreak.**
2. It also empowers state **to prescribe such temporary regulations** to be observed by the public or by any person or class of persons as it shall deem necessary to prevent the outbreak of such disease or the spread thereof.
3. The state may **determine in what manner and by whom any expenses incurred (including compensation if any) shall be defrayed.**
4. The State Government may take measures and prescribe regulations for **the inspection of persons travelling** by railway or otherwise, and the segregation, in hospital, temporary accommodation or otherwise, of persons suspected by the inspecting officer of being infected with any such disease.
5. It also provides **penalties for disobeying any regulation or order made under the Act.** These are according to section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (Disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant).
6. It also gives **legal protection to the implementing officers acting under the Act.**

Examples of implementation:

1. In 2018, the district collector of Gujarat's Vadodara issued a notification under the Act declaring the Khedkarsiya village in Waghdia taluka **as cholera-affected** after 31 persons complained of symptoms of the disease.
2. In 2015, **to deal with malaria and dengue in Chandigarh**, the Act was implemented and controlling officers were instructed to ensure the issuance of notices and challans of Rs 500 to offenders.

3. In 2009, to tackle the swine flu outbreak in Pune, Section 2 powers were used to open screening centres in civic hospitals across the city, and swine flu was declared a **notifiable disease**.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. Previous examples of implementation of this Act, diseases for which it was declared.
2. A notifiable disease.
3. Implementing agency, penalty, protection and inspection of people under the act.
4. Handling of the plague epidemic by British, criticisms by Tilak through his papers.

Mains Link:

Discuss the key provisions of the 1897 Epidemic Diseases Act.

Link:

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/armed-with-ordinance-odisha-now-may-send-epidemic-rule-violators-to-jail-for-2-yrs/articleshow/75065628.cms>

Sources: ET.

7. Government amends the extant FDI policy

What to study?

For Prelims: Key changes introduced and implications.

For Mains: Significance and the need for these measures.

Context: The Government has amended certain sections of the FDI policy for **curbing opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions of Indian companies due to the current COVID-19 pandemic**.

While India shares a land border with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, China and Afghanistan, the move appears directed mostly at China.

The changes introduced:

1. All FDI proposals from countries sharing border with India will be under the government approval route.
2. The so-called automatic route, under which the central bank simply had to be informed after money was invested, has been blocked in such cases.
3. Companies whose beneficial ownership also lies in such countries will have to undergo government scrutiny for any change in foreign holding.

Need for these measures:

- Many Indian businesses have come to a halt due to the lockdown imposed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently their valuations have plummeted.
- Many such domestic firms may be vulnerable to opportunistic takeovers or acquisitions from foreign players.
- Recently, People's Bank of China made a portfolio investment through the stock market into the housing finance company HDFC and now holds a 1.01% stake in the company.

How was the FDI policy for neighbours so far?

1. A non-resident entity can invest in India, subject to the FDI Policy except in those sectors/activities which are prohibited.
2. However, a citizen of Bangladesh or an entity incorporated in Bangladesh can invest only under the Government route.
3. Further, a citizen of Pakistan or an entity incorporated in Pakistan can invest, only under the Government route, in sectors/activities other than defence, space, atomic energy and sectors/activities prohibited for foreign investment.

Concerns and unintended impacts:

1. The amended policy makes every type of investment by Chinese investors subject to government approval. Such a blanket application could create unintended problems.
2. It does not distinguish between Greenfield and Brownfield investments. It may pose obstacles to Greenfield investments where Chinese investors bring fresh capital to establish new factories and generate employment in India.
3. The new policy does not distinguish between the different types of investors, such as industry players, financial institutions, or venture capital funds. The restrictions on Venture capital funds may impact the prospects of many start-ups in the Indian market.

Chinese investment In India:

- China's footprint in the Indian business space has been expanding rapidly, especially since 2014.
- The Chinese investment in India in 2014 stood at \$1.6 billion. This involved mostly investment from Chinese state-owned players in the infrastructure space in India.
- By 2017, the total investment had increased five-fold to at least \$8 billion accompanied by a marked shift from a state-driven to market-driven approach.
- Total current and planned Chinese investment in India has crossed \$26 billion in March 2020.

Sources: pib.

8. Why govt is encouraging ethanol production?

What to study?

For Prelims: ethanol- production and benefits.

For Mains: Need for blending and the demand for increased production?

Context: Surplus rice available with the FCI is allowed to be converted to ethanol for utilization in making alcohol-based hand-sanitizers and for blending in petrol.

Approval in this regard was recently given by the **National Biofuel Coordination Committee (NBCC)**.

Even sugar mills have simultaneously ramped up hand sanitiser manufacturing capacity to almost 100,000 litres per day to cater its rising demand following the coronavirus outbreak.

Background:

The Government of India launched the **EBP programme in 2003** for undertaking the blending of ethanol in petrol to address the environmental concerns due to fossil fuel burning, provide remuneration to farmers, subsidize crude imports and achieve forex savings.

Besides, the **National Policy on Biofuels, 2018** envisages that during an agriculture crop year when there is projected over supply of food grains as anticipated by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, the policy will allow conversion of these surplus quantities of food grains to ethanol, based on the approval NBCC.

Related- What are ethanol and molasses?

Ethanol, or ethyl alcohol, is a **liquid that has several uses**. At 95% purity, it is called rectified spirit and is used as the intoxicating ingredient in alcoholic beverages. At 99%-plus purity, ethanol is used for blending with petrol.

- Both products are made from molasses, a byproduct of sugar manufacturing. For making sugar, mills crush sugarcane which typically has a total fermentable sugars (TFS) content of 14%.
- The TFS component consists of sucrose along with the reducing sugars glucose and fructose. Most of this TFS component gets crystallised into sugar, and the remaining part is called molasses.

Molasses stages:

The molasses go through three stages — A, B, and C, the last one being where the molasses are most un-crystallised and non-recoverable.

- The 'C' molasses roughly constitute 4.5% of the cane, and have a remaining TFS of 40%.
- After C-molasses are sent to the distillery, ethanol is extracted from them. Every 100 kg of TFS yields 60 litres of ethanol.

- Thus, from one tonne of cane, mills can produce 115 kg of sugar (at 11.5% recovery) and 45 kg of molasses (18 kg TFS) that gives 10.8 litres of ethanol.

How more ethanol can be produced?

Mills can also produce only ethanol from sugarcane, without producing sugar at all. In this case, the entire 14% TFS in the cane is fermented. Here, a mill can make 84 litres of ethanol and zero kg of sugar.

- In between the two extreme cases, **there are intermediate options as well, where the cane juice does not have to be crystallised right till the final 'C' molasses stage.** The molasses can, instead, be diverted after the earlier 'A' and 'B' stages of sugar crystal formation. Mills, then, would produce some sugar, as opposed to fermenting the whole sugarcane juice into ethanol.
- If ethanol is manufactured using 'B' heavy molasses (7.25% of cane and with TFS of 50%), around 21.75 litres will get produced along with 95 kg of sugar from every 1 tonne of cane.

Why focus on more ethanol?

Mills currently have all-time-high stocks of sugar, and they have been at loggerheads with farmers over non-payment of dues.

Mill owners insist that the reason behind their woes is excess production of sugar and fall in its price.

Under the circumstances, **ethanol is the only real saviour — both for mills and cane growers.**

1. Recently, the government approved an increase in the price of ethanol to be procured by public sector oil marketing companies from sugar mills for blending with petrol for the 2019-20 supply year from December 1.
2. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs also allowed conversion of old sugar into ethanol, which again is expected to help mills deal with the current overproduction in the sweetener and make timely payments to farmers for the cane delivered by them.
3. Ethanol production has been additionally facilitated with the government mandating 10% blending of petrol with ethanol.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is ethanol? How is it produced?
2. Difference between ethanol and molasses?
3. What is ethanol blending programme?
4. Benefits of ethanol blending?

Mains Link:

Write a note on the 2013 EBP programme.

Sources: pib.

9. Vijay Mallya loses extradition appeal in UK

What to study?

For Prelims: Who is a fugitive economic offender, about PMLA, ED and CBI.

For Mains: Significance of the latest ruling, impact and way ahead.

Context: A UK High Court has dismissed fugitive liquor baron Vijay Mallya's appeal against extradition to India.

What's the issue?

Mallya and his firm – Kingfisher Airlines Ltd, have come under the scanner of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) for loan defaults of over Rs 10,000 crore to a consortium of Indian banks led by the State Bank of India (SBI).

While Mallya is facing charges of cheating, criminal conspiracy, money laundering and diversion of loan funds, a few of his companies including Kingfisher Airlines are facing charges of violations of **the Companies Act 2013 and Sebi norms.** Mallya, has denied any wrongdoing.

Charges against Mallya:

ED has charged Mallya under **sections 3 and 4 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)**.

CBI has charged Mallya under **section 120B (criminal conspiracy), 420 (cheating) and under sections 13 (1) (d) and 13 (2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act.**

What are the options for Vijay Mallya now?

1. Mallya now has 14 days to apply to the UK High Court for permission for an application to certify that a point of law of general public importance has been overlooked by both the magistrate court and the high court.
2. If the High Court gives such a permission, he can then appeal against the extradition order in the UK Supreme Court.
3. In case the High Court refuses the permission, Mallya will not be able to appeal in the Supreme Court.
4. In such a situation, his case will go to the UK secretary of state, Home Department for a final decision on extradition. If secretary gives her consent, Mallya can be extradited to India.

First person to be declared a fugitive offender:

Vijay Mallya is also **the first person to be declared a fugitive offender under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act.**

Definition- Fugitive Economic Offender:

A person can be named an offender under this law if there is an arrest warrant against him or her for involvement in economic offences involving at least Rs. 100 crore or more and has fled from India to escape legal action.

The procedure:

1. The investigating agencies have to file an application in a Special Court under the Prevention of Money-Laundering Act, 2002 containing details of the properties to be confiscated, and any information about the person's whereabouts.
2. The Special Court will issue a notice for the person to appear at a specified place and date at least six weeks from the issue of notice.
3. Proceedings will be terminated if the person appears. If not the person would be declared as a Fugitive Economic Offender based on the evidence filed by the investigating agencies.
4. The person who is declared as a Fugitive Economic Offender can challenge the proclamation in the High Court within 30 days of such declaration according to the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who is a fugitive economic offender?
2. Composition and powers of ED.
3. Establishment and powers of CBI.
4. What is PMLA?
5. Overview of Fugitive Economic Offenders Act.

Mains Link:

Discuss the significance and key provisions of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act.

Sources: the Hindu.

10. Industrial Relations Code Bill, 2019

What to study?

For Prelims: The labour code- key features.

For Mains: Need for and significance of the code.

Context: The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour has made suggestions to the Industrial Relations Code.

The code proposes to amalgamate The Trade Unions Act, 1926, The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946, and The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

Key suggestions made:

1. Centre should create a **formal and conducive industrial relations system** by strengthening the various provisions in the Code.
2. **In case of natural calamities, payment of wages to the workers until the re-establishment of the industry may be unjustifiable.** The law has to be reasonable, in such cases it is for the government to step in and extend a helping hand for the industries.
3. **A separate and an exclusive chapter should be created for outlining the rights of both the employee and the employer** containing the principles pertaining to the industrial relations based on the ILO conventions.
4. Union Labour Ministry should **include scheme workers like Anganwadi, Asha, Mid-day Meal, etc, in the definition of worker** on the ground that this is as per the existing provision for the formation of a Trade Union.
5. The Government should give a **consolidated and merged definition of worker/employee so that supervisors, managers, etc. could find a place therein.**

Need of the hour:

Governance of the industrial relations system is simply not about framing good laws but also designing adequate and effective mechanism for their efficient implementation. Therefore, it becomes imperative on the part of the Government to strive for creating a formal and conducive industrial relations system, by strengthening the various provisions in the Code, so as to do away with the ambiguities and uncertainties, which would result in aiding economic progress, employment generation and labour welfare.

Overview of the Bill:

1. Seeks to allow companies to **hire workers on fixed-term contract of any duration.**
2. Has retained **the threshold on the worker count at 100 for prior government approval** before retrenchment, but it has a **provision for changing 'such number of employees'** through notification.
3. Provides setting up of a **two-member tribunal** (in place of one member) wherein important cases will be adjudicated jointly and the rest by a single member, resulting speedier disposal of cases.
4. Has vested **powers with the government officers for adjudication of disputes involving penalty as fines.**
5. Introduces a **feature of 'recognition of negotiating union'** under which a trade union will be recognized as sole 'negotiating union' if it has the support of 75% or more of the workers on the rolls of an establishment.
6. Under the code, **termination of service of a worker on completion of tenure in a fixed-term employment will not be considered as retrenchment.**
7. Proposes setting up of a **"re-skilling fund"** for training of retrenched employees. The retrenched employee would be paid 15 days' wages from the fund within 45 days of retrenchment.

Significance:

The Indian economy grew at 5% in the June quarter, a six-year low, while the country's factory output shrank for the second straight month at 4.3% in September, recording its worst show since the present series was launched in April 2012.

The ease of compliance of labour laws will promote the setting up of more enterprises, thus catalysing the creation of employment opportunities in the country.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

Key provisions in the bill.

Mains Link:

Discuss the significance of the Industrial Relations Code Bill, 2019.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

What to study?

For Prelims: Overview, implementation and bodies established under the act.

For Mains: Significance of the law, performance analysis and ways to improve.

Context: A PIL has been filed in the Supreme Court demanding full wages for over 7.6 crore active job card holders under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** during the 21-day nationwide lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic outbreak.

What the PIL demands?

1. PIL urged the top court to “issue uniform guidelines to all states, UTs that for the entire duration of the lockdown at least all active and registered job card holders under the MGNREGA Act will be deemed to be at work and accordingly **make full payment of their wages at the earliest.**”
2. It also want the apex court to **increase the entitlement from 100 days of work to 200 days per household to support rural livelihoods during the emerging economic crisis.**
3. It also requested the top court to direct the Centre and states to issue **individual temporary job cards within 15 days to all migrants who have returned from the cities to their native villages.**

Why this is necessary?

MGNREGA is a programme meant to be a lifeline to rural workers during this kind of distress circumstances. Therefore, it would be completely unfair to not enable MGNREGA to provide the support that it is designed to give when rural workers are facing the country’s worst challenge of unemployment and limited access to money and foodgrains.

Over 12.2 crore labourers work in MGNREGA every year.

About MGNREGA:

The scheme was introduced as a social measure that guarantees “**the right to work**”.

The key tenet of this social measure and labour law is that the local government will have to **legally provide at least 100 days of wage employment in rural India to enhance their quality of life.**

Key objectives:

1. Generation of paid rural employment of not less than 100 days for each worker who volunteers for unskilled labour.
2. Proactively ensuring social inclusion by strengthening livelihood base of rural poor.
3. Creation of durable assets in rural areas such as wells, ponds, roads and canals.
4. Reduce urban migration from rural areas.
5. Create rural infrastructure by using untapped rural labour.

The following are the eligibility criteria for receiving the benefits under MGNREGA scheme:

1. Must be Citizen of India to seek NREGA benefits.
2. Job seeker has completed 18 years of age at the time of application.
3. The applicant must be part of a local household (i.e. application must be made with local Gram Panchayat).
4. Applicant must volunteer for unskilled labour.

Key facts related to the scheme:

1. The **Ministry of Rural Development (MRD)**, Govt of India is monitoring the entire implementation of this scheme in association with state governments.

2. **Individual beneficiary oriented works** can be taken up on the cards of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, small or marginal farmers or beneficiaries of land reforms or beneficiaries under the Indira Awaas Yojana of the Government of India.
3. Within 15 days of submitting the application or from the day work is demanded, **wage employment will be provided to the applicant.**
4. **Right to get unemployment allowance** in case employment is not provided within fifteen days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought.
5. **Social Audit of MGNREGA works is mandatory**, which lends to accountability and transparency.
6. The Gram Sabha is the principal forum for wage seekers to raise their voices and make demands.
7. It is the Gram Sabha and the Gram Panchayat which approves the shelf of works under MGNREGA and fix their priority.

Role of Gram Sabha:

1. It determines the order of priority of works in the meetings of the Gram Sabha keeping in view potential of the local area, its needs, local resources.
2. Monitor the execution of works within the GP.

Roles of Gram Panchayat:

1. Receiving applications for registration
2. Verifying registration applications
3. Registering households
4. Issuing Job Cards (JCs)
5. Receiving applications for work
6. Issuing dated receipts for these applications for work
7. Allotting work within fifteen days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought in the case of an advance application.
8. Identification and planning of works, developing shelf of projects including determination of the order of their priority.

Responsibilities of State Government in MGNREGA:

1. Frame Rules on matters pertaining to State responsibilities under Section 32 of the Act ii) Develop and notify the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for the State.
2. Set up the State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGc).
3. Set up a State level MGNREGA implementation agency/ mission with adequate number of high calibre professionals.
4. Set up a State level MGNREGA social audit agency/directorate with adequate number of people with knowledge on MGNREGA processes and demonstrated commitment to social audit.
5. Establish and operate a State Employment Guarantee Fund (SEGf).

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Under MGNREGA, what are the roles of Gram Sabha, Gram Panchayat, States, State Food Commission, Centre?
2. What are jobs cards, who issues them?
3. Who sets up SEGf?
4. What is Wage employment?
5. Who conducts social audit?

Mains Link:

Discuss the key features and significance of MGNREGA.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pil-in-supreme-court-seeks-full-wages-for-mgnrega-workers-for-coronavirus-lockdown-period/article31258686.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)

What to study?

For Prelims: Features of PMBJP and Janaushadhi Suvidha.

For Mains: Health facilities for the underprivileged- need and efforts by the government, generic medicines and their increasing popularity worldwide.

Context: Pharmacists, popularly known as "**Swasth ke Sipahi**", of Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Kendra, are delivering essential services and medicines at doorstep of patients and elderly under **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)** of the Government of India.

Background:

Working as part of **Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Kendras (PMJAK)**, they are extending essential services by making available quality generic medicines at affordable prices to the common People of the country and the elderly persons at their doorstep to fight Corona pandemic. This is supporting the government's initiative of practicing social distancing.

About PMBJP:

'Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana' is a campaign launched by **the Department of Pharmaceuticals**, Govt. Of India, to provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses through special kendra's known as **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra**.

Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI) is the implementing agency of PMBJP. BPPI (Bureau of Pharma Public Sector Undertakings of India) has been established under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Govt. of India, with the support of all the CPSUs.

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE SCHEME:

1. Ensure access to quality medicines.
2. Extend coverage of quality generic medicines so as to reduce the out of pocket expenditure on medicines and thereby redefine the unit cost of treatment per person.
3. Create awareness about generic medicines through education and publicity so that quality is not synonymous with only high price.
4. A public programme involving Government, PSUs, Private Sector, NGO, Societies, Co-operative Bodies and other Institutions.
5. Create demand for generic medicines by improving access to better healthcare through low treatment cost and easy availability wherever needed in all therapeutic categories.

What is a generic medicine?

There is no definition of generic or branded medicines under **the Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules, 1945** made thereunder. However, generic medicines are generally those which contain same amount of same active ingredient(s) in same dosage form and are intended to be administered by the same route of administration as that of branded medicine.

The price of an unbranded generic version of a medicine is generally lower than the price of a corresponding branded medicine because in case of generic version, the pharmaceutical company does not have to spend money on promotion of its brand.

How are they regulated in India?

Drugs manufactured in the country, irrespective of whether they are generic or branded, are required to comply with the same standards as prescribed in **the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules, 1945** made thereunder for their quality.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. Regulation of generic medicines.
2. What are Jan Aushadhi Kendras?

3. About BPPI.

Mains Link:

Write a note on Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana.

Sources: pib.

3. Charting a Common Minimum Relief Programme

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Overview of the proposed programme.

Context: With India likely to experience an economic crisis because of lockdown, it is time for the Centre to chart a **Common Minimum Relief Programme**.

The economic pandemic that is likely to succeed COVID-19 threatens to be as large in scale if not larger than the public health crisis that we continue to battle.

Need of the hour:

1. States should come up with varying measures for support and relief.
2. Centre must lead this effort to ensure uniformity, optimisation and coordination amongst States of varying economic capability.
3. The road map should provide forward guidance and economic clarity to the middle class, medium and small-scale enterprises and above all, to those at the very margins of society.

The focus should be mainly on:

1. Daily wage earners, labourers and migrant workers. They are at the greatest risk of economic and social insecurity.
2. **Small and marginal farmers** are in dire need of immediate support.
3. **Supply chain disruptions for fast moving consumer goods** due to unavailability of labour, difficulty in transporting goods across borders during the lockdown. This is leading to a shortage of foodstuffs and other essential items.
4. **Medium and Small-Scale Enterprises.** There are currently close to 4.25 crore registered MSMEs which contribute 29% to India's GDP (or nearly 61 lakh crores) and these have been hit hardest by the COVID-19 crisis imperilling, in turn, the livelihood of crores.
5. **Middle class** for they are facing growing vulnerability.

What needs to be done?

- There should be a uniform mechanism for the dispersal of both income support as well as essential items such as rice, wheat, millets, medicines, water and anything else that vulnerable families will require.
- To ensure the agriculture problem doesn't become cyclical, the government needs to make immediate arrangements for ensuring the availability of fertilisers, pesticides, other inputs (including access to lines of credit) for the planting of the next kharif crop as well.
- For Medium and Small-Scale Enterprises, the government must lay out an action plan, including a financial package, to fortify this sector or risk see it perish.
- **NYAY (Nyuntam Aay Yojana), the Minimum Income Guarantee Programme.** The Central government must devise and implement this scheme, at least as a temporary measure.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is Nyay programme?
2. How are MSMEs governed?
3. Classification of MSMEs?

Mains Link:

Write a note on Nyay, the Minimum Income Guarantee Programme.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/charting-a-common-minimum-relief-programme/article31268751.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)

What to study?

For Prelims: PMU- key features.

For Mains: PMUY- objectives, features, significance and measures needed to sustain the momentum.

Context: Over 1.51 Crore free LPG cylinders distributed so far to the PMUY beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) in this month.

Background:

Under the PMGKY, several relief measures have been announced by the central Government for the welfare of poor, and one of the important component of the Yojana is to provide **3 LPG cylinders (14.2 kg) free to over 8 crore beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjawala Yojana (PMUY)** over the period of April to June 2020.

The Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) are distributing 50 to 60 lakh cylinders per day, which includes about 18 lakh free cylinders to PMUY beneficiaries.

Key features of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

Aim: To provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households.

Goal: A deposit-free LPG connection is given to eligible with financial assistance of Rs 1,600 per connection by the Centre.

Eligibility criteria:

1. Applicant must be a woman above the age of 18 and a citizen of India.
2. Applicant should belong to a BPL (Below Poverty Line) household.
3. No one in the applicant's household should own an LPG connection.
4. The household income of the family, per month, must not exceed a certain limit as defined by the government of the Union Territories and State Government.
5. The name of the applicant must be in the list of SECC-2011 data and should match with the information available in the BPL database that Oil Marketing Companies have.
6. Applicant must not be a recipient of other similar schemes provided by the government.

Objectives of the scheme are:

1. Empowering women and protecting their health.
2. Reducing the serious health hazards associated with cooking based on fossil fuel.
3. Reducing the number of deaths in India due to unclean cooking fuel.
4. Preventing young children from significant number of acute respiratory illnesses caused due to indoor air pollution by burning the fossil fuel.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Which ministry implements PMUY?
2. When was it launched?
3. Eligibility for PMUY?
4. Incentives for Oil marketing companies?
5. Is there any financial assistance available under the scheme?

Mains Link:

Discuss the key features and significance of PMUY.

Sources: pib.

5. Ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

What to study?

For Prelims: Overview of the ordinance and epidemics diseases act.

For Mains: Need for and significance of this ordinance.

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved promulgation of an Ordinance to amend the **Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897** to protect healthcare service personnel and property including their living/working premises against violence during epidemics.

The ordinance is intended to ensure that during any situation akin to the current pandemic, **there is zero tolerance to any form of violence against healthcare service personnel and damage to property.**

How the current COVID-19 pandemic has affected critical service providers?

Members of healthcare services are **targeted and attacked by miscreants**, thereby obstructing them from doing their duties.

They have become the most vulnerable victims as **they have been perceived by some as carriers of the virus**. This has led to cases of their **stigmatization and ostracization** and sometimes worse, acts of unwarranted **violence and harassment**.

What is the fallout?

Such a situation tends to **hamper the medical community from performing their duties to their optimum best and maintaining their morale**, which is a critical need in this hour of national health crisis.

Need for a National Level legislation:

The existing state laws do not have a wide sweep and ambit. They generally do not cover harassment at home and workplace and are focused more on physical violence only. The penal provisions contained in these laws are not stringent enough to deter mischief mongering.

Overview of the ordinance and key provisions in it:

1. The Ordinance provides for making acts of violence **cognizable and non-bailable offences**.
2. It has provisions for **compensation** for injury to healthcare service personnel or for causing damage or loss to the property in which healthcare service personnel may have a direct interest in relation to the epidemic.
3. Violence includes **harassment and physical injury and damage to property**.
4. **Healthcare service personnel** include public and clinical healthcare service providers such as doctors, nurses, paramedical workers and community health workers; any other persons empowered under the Act to take measures to prevent the outbreak of the disease or spread thereof; and any persons declared as such by the State Government, by notification in the Official Gazette.
5. **Punishment** can be imprisonment for a term of three months to five years, and with fine of Rs.50,000/- to Rs.2,00,000/-. In case of causing grievous hurt, imprisonment shall be for a term six months to seven years and with fine of Rs.1,00,000/- to Rs.5,00,000/-.
6. **Offences shall be investigated by** an officer of the rank of Inspector within a period of 30 days, and trial has to be completed in one year, unless extended by the court for reasons to be recorded in writing.

Provisions of the 1897 Epidemic Diseases Act:

- It empowers **state governments/UTs to take special measures and formulate regulations** for containing the outbreak.
- It also empowers **state to prescribe such temporary regulations** to be observed by the public or by any person or class of persons as it shall deem necessary to prevent the outbreak of such disease or the spread thereof.

- The state may determine in what manner and by whom any expenses incurred (including compensation if any) shall be defrayed.
- It also provides **penalties** for disobeying any regulation or order made under the Act. These are according to **section 188** of the Indian Penal Code (Disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant).
- It also gives **legal protection to the implementing officers acting under the Act.**

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. What is Ordinance? How and when is it promulgated?
2. Definition of violence in the ordinance.
3. Previous examples of implementation of Epidemics Diseases Act, diseases for which it was declared.
4. A notifiable disease.
5. Implementing agency, penalty, protection and inspection of people under the act.
6. Handling of the plague epidemic by British, criticisms by Tilak through his papers.

Mains Link:

Discuss the key provisions of the 1897 Epidemic Diseases Act.

Sources: pib.

6. Who are Chakmas and Hajongs?

What to study?

For Prelims: Who are they? Where do they live?

For Mains: Challenges faced by these communities and ways to address them.

Context: Human rights body - **Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG)** - has sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention alleging that **the Chakmas and Hajongs** in Arunachal Pradesh are facing hunger and starvation as they were not included in the government's economic package.

What's the issue?

The state government announced the economic package for vulnerable sections in these difficult times of COVID-19 pandemic, among others, to provide 5 kg rice and 1 kg pulses per head to beneficiaries under **Pradhan Mantri Garib Anna Yojana**.

- But, Chakmas and Hajongs do not have ration cards as the state government had seized those through an order on October 25, 1991. Hence, the two communities have been forced to buy rice at a higher price.
- About 33% or 22,000 of the 65,875 Chakmas and Hajongs are children. Hunger and starvation have engulfed them because of the violation of the right to food during the pandemic.
- And, the denial of food is being seen as a **violation of the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.**

Who are they?

Chakmas and Hajongs were originally residents of Chittagong Hill Tracts in the erstwhile East Pakistan. They left their homeland when it was submerged by the Kaptai dam project in the 1960s.

The Chakmas, who are Buddhists, and the Hajongs, who are Hindus, also allegedly faced religious persecution and entered India through the then Lushai Hills district of Assam (now Mizoram). The Centre moved the majority of them to the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which is now Arunachal Pradesh.

Their numbers have gone up from about 5,000 in 1964-69 to one lakh. At present, they don't have citizenship and land rights but are provided basic amenities by the state government.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/chakmas-hajongs-starving-in-arunachal-says-rights-body/article31447579.ece>

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

1. Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccination

What to study?

For Prelims: Use and applicability of this vaccine, what is TB?

For Mains: Criticisms wrt the recent report on usage of this vaccine to treat COVID 19.

Context: According to a US-based research, a combination of reduced morbidity and mortality could make **the Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccination** a “game-changer” in the fight against novel coronavirus.

What is BCG Vaccine?

Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine is a vaccine **primarily used against tuberculosis (TB)**.

- In countries where TB or leprosy is common, one dose is recommended in healthy babies as close to the time of birth as possible.
- In areas where tuberculosis is not common, only children at high risk are typically immunized, while suspected cases of tuberculosis are individually tested for and treated.

How can TB vaccine help fight COVID-19?

- The BCG vaccine contains a live but weakened strain of tuberculosis bacteria that provokes the body to develop antibodies to attack TB bacteria.
- This is called an **adaptive immune response**, because the body develops a defense against a specific disease-causing microorganism, or pathogen, after encountering it.
- Most vaccines create an adaptive immune response to a single pathogen.
- Unlike other vaccines, the BCG vaccine may also boost the innate immune system, first-line defenses that keep a variety of pathogens from entering the body or from establishing an infection.

But, what's the concern now?

Doctors and scientists in India have expressed caution on this study, which argues that countries that have deployed the BCG-tuberculosis vaccine in their immunisation programmes have seen fewer deaths from COVID-19.

They say, it is premature for India, that has had a consistent TB vaccination policy since 1968, to take comfort from the study.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. What is BCG?
2. What is adaptive immune response?
3. Difference between diseases caused by bacteria and virus.
4. What is TB?

Mains Link:

What is adaptive immune response? Discuss how BCG vaccine fights against tuberculosis?

Sources: down to earth.

2. What is cytokine storm?

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: What is Cytokine Storm? What is immune system? How it works?

Context: Of all the possible compounding effects of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, **the cytokine storm is one of the most feared**.

How does our immune systems generally work?

1. The immune systems in our bodies protect us from bacteria, viruses, and parasites by removing them from our systems.
2. The immune system gets activated by things that the body does not recognise as its own. These things are called **antigens**, and include bacteria, fungi and viruses.
3. An effective immune system response involves inflammation, an important and indispensable part of the process.
4. Inflammation has an important protective function. **The release of inflammatory mediators increases the blood flow to the area, which allows larger numbers of immune system cells to be carried to the injured tissue, thereby aiding the repairing process.**

If this inflammatory response is not regulated, a 'cytokine storm' can be triggered.

So, what is cytokine storm?

A cytokine storm is an **overproduction of immune cells and their activating compounds (cytokines)**, which, in a flu infection, is often associated with a surge of activated immune cells into the lungs.

The resulting lung inflammation and fluid buildup can lead to respiratory distress and can be contaminated by a secondary bacterial pneumonia -- often enhancing the mortality in patients.

Occurrence:

A cytokine storm can occur due to an infection, auto-immune condition, or other diseases. Signs and symptoms include high fever, inflammation (redness and swelling), severe fatigue, and nausea.

Cytokine storms are not exclusive to coronavirus patients. **It is an immune reaction that can occur during other infectious and non-infectious diseases as well.**

What then, is the role of cytokines in the immune system?

Cytokines are **signalling proteins** that are released by cells at local high concentrations — a cytokine storm or CSS is characterised by the overproduction of immune cells and the cytokines themselves because of a **dysregulation** in the process.

A severe immune reaction, leading to the secretion of too many cytokines in the bloodstream, can be harmful since an excess of immune cells can attack healthy tissue as well.

How does CSS impact a COVID-19 patient?

In the case of any flu infection, a cytokine storm is associated with a surge of activated immune cells into the lungs, which, instead of fighting off the antigen, leads to lung inflammation and fluid build-up, and respiratory distress.

Previous instances:

It is seen as a likely major cause of mortality in the 1918-20 "Spanish flu" -- which killed more than 50 million people worldwide -- and the H1N1 "swine flu" and H5N1 "bird flu" of recent years. In these epidemics, the patients most likely to die were relatively young adults with apparently strong immune reactions to the infection -- whereas ordinary seasonal flu epidemics disproportionately affect the very young and the elderly.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Antibody vs antigen.
2. Virus vs bacteria vs fungi – basic difference.
3. How immunity works?
4. How and why inflammation occurs?

Mains Link:

What is cytokine storm? How it is linked to increasing number of deaths in COVID 19 cases? Discuss.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-cytokine-storms-or-when-the-bodys-own-immune-system-leads-to-covid-19-deaths-6346145/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

3. Coronavirus containment plan

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Overview, need for and significance of the containment plan.

Context: India has prepared a “containment” plan, essentially an updated version of an earlier Health Ministry blueprint that was drawn up when the only COVID-19 cases were those coming from abroad.

What are the components of the containment plan?

The plan outlines a strategic approach based on the stage of transmission.

Five stages have been identified — travel-related case reported in India; local transmission; large outbreaks amenable to containment; widespread community transmission; India becoming endemic for COVID-19. The plan is subject to revisions if required, as and when there is greater clarity about some of these aspects.

What is the approach recommended for the various stages?

Containment of local transmission:

1. Extensive contact tracing and search for cases in the containment zone.
2. Testing all suspect cases and high-risk contacts.
3. Isolating all suspect or confirmed cases.
4. Quarantining contacts and social distancing.

For larger outbreaks, in addition to the usual measures:

There is higher focus on a particular geographic zone and hospitals around the area are prepared for a rise in cases. In addition, all asymptomatic healthcare workers are to be given **hydroxychloroquine** as a preventive.

How are confirmed and suspected cases to be dealt with?

1. All suspect/confirmed COVID-19 cases will be hospitalized and kept in isolation in dedicated COVID-19 hospitals/hospital blocks.
2. Persons testing positive for COVID-19 will remain hospitalized till such time as two of their samples are tested negative as per discharge policy.
3. To reduce the burden on hospitals, there is a plan to temporarily convert hotels/ hostels/ guesthouses/ stadiums near a COVID-19 hospital as care centres where mild cases may be kept.
4. Dedicated COVID-19 hospitals/dedicated blocks in large hospitals will be identified and operationalized.
5. Moderate to severe cases, who require monitoring of their clinical status (patients with radiological evidence of pneumonia) will be admitted to COVID hospital. For more severe cases requiring respiratory or other support, tertiary care centres both private and government will be included as part of the micro plan.

Differential approach:

The plan has differential approach to different regions of the country, while mounting a strong containment effort in hot spots.

The Health Ministry has issued directions for **categorisation of designated facilities into three groups** — COVID care centres, COVID health centres and dedicated COVID hospitals.

1. The care centres will be for cases clinically assigned as mild or very mild, or suspected cases.
2. The health centres are hospitals that will offer care for all cases that have been clinically assigned as moderate.
3. The dedicated hospitals will offer comprehensive care, primarily for those clinically assigned as severe.

Protection of healthcare personnel:

The plan reiterates the need for adequate PPE.

1. At all times doctors, nurses and para-medics working in the clinical areas will wear three-layered surgical mask and gloves.
2. The medical personnel working in isolation and critical care facilities where aerosolisation is anticipated, will wear full complement of PPE (including N95 masks).
3. The support staff engaged in cleaning and disinfection will also wear full complement of PPE.
4. Environmental cleaning should be done twice daily and consist of damp dusting and floor mopping with Lysol or other phenolic disinfectants and cleaning of commonly touched surfaces with sodium hypochlorite solution.
5. **Sodium hypochlorite** is already being used extensively, including in the Nizamuddin headquarters of the Tablighi Jamaat.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-as-covid-19-fight-rages-how-short-is-the-world-of-nurses-6355226/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

4. “State of the World’s Nursing” report

What to study?

For Prelims: Key findings, challenges and concerns highlighted.

For Mains: Measures to address these concerns and challenges.

Context: WHO, along with the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the Nursing Now campaign, has released a report titled, “State of the World’s Nursing”.

Key findings and observations- Areas of concern:

1. Globally, there are roughly 36.9 nurses per 10,000 people, with **variations within and across regions**.
2. There are almost 10 times more nurses in the Americas than in the African region. While there are 83.4 nurses per 10,000 population in the former, there are 8.7 nurses per 10,000 population in the latter.
3. By 2030, there will be a **shortage of over 5.7 million nurses worldwide**.
4. The largest shortfall in absolute numbers is in the South-East Asian region, while in the Americas and Europe, the problem is different since they are facing an ageing nursing workforce.
5. Moreover, a number of high-income countries in Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean and American regions are “exclusively” dependent on migrant nurses.
6. As nurses and other medical workers are at the frontlines of this global pandemic, some of the key issues they face include shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) including face masks, eye-protective gear and gloves, and also the psychological stress faced by some medical staff.

What needs to be done?

Governments should invest in nursing education, jobs and leadership. Some of these measures include remunerating nurses according to the prevalent local, national and international labour market conditions.

Need for recognition of their works:

The report highlights that work nurses do is critical in fulfilling national and global targets related to universal health care, mental health, noncommunicable diseases, emergency preparedness and response, among others such goals.

- Within the healthcare sector, nurses play a critical role. They comprise the largest component of health professionals, at over 59 per cent — or 27.9 million in absolute numbers — underlining that their role, especially during the current health crisis, is paramount.
- Overall, nurses are important in ensuring the quality of care delivered to a patient, preventing and controlling infections and combating antimicrobial resistance.

State of Nursing in India:

1. As of 2018, there were over 1.56 million nurses in India and 772,575 nursing associates. Out of this, the share of professional nurses is 67 per cent, with 322,827 graduating every year with a minimum training period of four years.
2. Within the health workforce, nurses comprise 47 per cent of the medical staff, followed by doctors (23.3 per cent), dentists (5.5 per cent) and pharmacists (24.1 per cent).
3. Further, an overwhelming majority of the nurses are women — 88 per cent in India. This is in line with the composition of nursing seen globally as well, where 90 per cent are women.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-as-covid-19-fight-rages-how-short-is-the-world-of-nurses-6355226/>

Sources: Indian Express.

5. World Chagas Disease Day

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Chagan disease- causes, symptoms and treatment.

Context: On April 14, 2020, **World Chagas Disease Day is being observed for the first time.**

The day is observed to spread awareness about **this "silent and silenced disease"**.

The **72nd World Health Assembly** approved the designation of Chagas Disease Day on May 24, 2019.

Why it is called the "silent and silenced disease"?

The Chagas disease is called silent because **it progresses slowly, and silenced because it mainly affects the poor people who often lack political voice and proper health care.**

About the disease:

The disease got its name from **Dr Carlos Ribeiro Justiniano Chagas**, who diagnosed the first patient with the disease in Brazil on April 14, 1909.

It is classified as a **neglected tropical disease (NTD)**, meaning it affects the low-income populations in developing countries across the globe.

Also called **the American trypanosomiasis**, this vector-borne disease hits the most poverty-stricken communities, especially in Latin America.

How is it transmitted?

- A parasitic protozoan called **Trypanosoma cruzi** that causes this vector-borne disease is usually transmitted by faeces and urine of triatomine bugs or kissing bugs, which belongs to the family of assassin bugs.
- The disease can also be transmitted by contaminated food, organ transplantations, blood or blood products transfusion, and infected mothers to newborn.
- Lack of awareness and neglecting the symptoms, especially among poor households, results in much severe symptoms and even death.

The symptoms of the disease come in two phases:

Symptoms include fever, muscle pain, headache, difficulty in breathing, abdominal or chest pain and enlarged lymph glands.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What are neglected tropical diseases?
2. Difference between Protozoa, bacteria and viruses?
3. Why this disease is called the "silent and silenced disease"?
4. What is World Health Assembly?

Mains Link:

Write a note on Neglected Tropical Diseases.

Sources: pib.

6. Measles

What to study?

For prelims and mains: Measles- causes, symptoms, spread and vaccines.

Context: As per UNICEF and WHO, around 117 million children worldwide risk contracting measles because dozens of countries are curtailing their vaccination programmes as they battle COVID-19.

What's the issue?

Currently 24 countries, including several already dealing with large measles outbreaks, have suspended widespread vaccinations.

The coronavirus pandemic, which has necessitated many prevention measures including strict lockdowns, has kept infants from getting routine immunisation services from some other diseases such as polio, yellow fever and cholera.

About Measles:

What is It?

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease. It remains an important cause of death among young children globally, despite the availability of a safe and effective vaccine.

Spread: Measles is transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth or throat of infected persons.

Symptoms:

- Initial symptoms, which usually appear 10–12 days after infection, include high fever, a runny nose, bloodshot eyes, and tiny white spots on the inside of the mouth. Several days later, a rash develops, starting on the face and upper neck and gradually spreading downwards.
- The most serious complications include blindness, encephalitis (an infection that causes brain swelling), severe diarrhoea and related dehydration, and severe respiratory infections such as pneumonia.

Vulnerability:

Severe measles is more likely among poorly nourished young children, especially those with insufficient vitamin A, or whose immune systems have been weakened by HIV/AIDS or other diseases.

Prevention:

Routine measles vaccination for children, combined with mass immunization campaigns in countries with low routine coverage, are key public health strategies to reduce global measles deaths.

Preventive efforts:

Under the **Global Vaccine Action Plan**, measles and rubella are targeted for elimination in five WHO Regions by 2020. WHO is the lead technical agency responsible for coordination of immunization and surveillance activities supporting all countries to achieve this goal.

What is Rubella?

Also called **German Measles**, Rubella is a contagious, generally mild viral infection that occurs most often in children and young adults.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Difference between Measles and Rubella?
2. What is Global Vaccine Action Plan?
3. Difference between contagious and non contagious viral infection?
4. How vaccination works?

5. Composition of UNICEF.

Mains Link:

Where does India stand in battle against Measles? Do you think India can achieve its 2020 target? Discuss the status of MR in India and the challenges it has been facing in eliminating the same.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GEE7BGMHA.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

7. Civil Defence volunteers

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Their Selection, administration and significance.

Context: More than 50,000 **Civil Defence volunteers** are working at the grassroots level in various roles and capacities to assist the local administration in implementing the measures to contain the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

How they are helping?

- The Civil Defence personnel are supplementing the local administration in conducting surveillance of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases. They have been working as rapid response teams.
- They have been deployed in all the States and most Union Territories, barring Ladakh, Daman & Diu, and Puducherry.
- Rajasthan, Karnataka, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Uttarakhand and Assam have taken the lead in using their services.
- The volunteers have been deployed under the command of District Magistrates to assist the local administration in implementing the COVID-19 guidelines and policies effectively.

How civil defence personnel can be employed? Provisions in this regard?

Civil Defence operates under the **Civil Defence Act** and associated rules and regulations.

The Act was amended in 2009 and a notification was issued in 2010 to include disaster management as an additional role.

Civil Defence is primarily organised on **voluntary basis** except for a small nucleus of paid staff and establishment which is augmented during emergencies.

Administration:

Although it is a Central law, **Section 4 of the Civil Defence Act** empowers State governments to raise corps at the local administration level as per their requirement.

The District Magistrate, District Collector or Deputy Commissioner is designated as **Controller of the Civil Defence**.

Eligibility for becoming a Civil Defence Volunteer:

A person who intends to apply for appointment to a Civil Defence Corps must fulfil the following conditions;

1. s/he shall be a citizen of India, or a subject of Sikkim or of Bhutan or of Nepal.
2. s/he shall have completed the age of 18 years provided that this age limit may be relaxed at the discretion of the competent authority up to a maximum of 3 years for any branch or category of the Corps.
3. s/he shall have passed at least the primary standard, that is to say, the fourth class, and this condition may be relaxed by the Controller at this discretion.

Both men and women shall be eligible for appointment to the Corps.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who can be civil defence volunteers?

2. How are they administered?
3. What are the tasks that they can carry out?

Mains Link:

Discuss the role and significance of civil defence volunteers.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/civil-defence-volunteers-join-containment-efforts/article31349697.ece>

Sources: the Hindu.

8. Colour coding to help manage COVID-19 pandemic

What to study?

For Prelims: How are the districts divided? State with max hotspots? Implications?

For Mains: Need for these classifications, challenges ahead and measures needed.

Context: The government has decided to **divide all districts across the country into hotspots, non-hotspots and green zones.**

The health and family welfare ministry has identified **170 hotspot districts, 207 non-hotspot districts reporting cases and 359 green zone districts** not reporting any cases across the country.

These numbers will increase or decrease based on fresh cases of novel coronavirus infection.

Why this classification was necessary? What are its implications?

This will help in managing the Covid-19 pandemic as well as partial opening up of economic activities during the extended period of the nationwide lockdown. This would help in **management of hotspots and spread of pandemic.**

How are the districts divided?

The health ministry used **two criteria to classify the districts as hotspots** — the absolute number of cases and the speed of growth in cases.

The technical definition followed to classify the districts is **any district reporting more than six cases would be classified as hotspot district or red zone.**

Any hotspot district with more than 15 cases would be treated as **a district witnessing outbreak.**

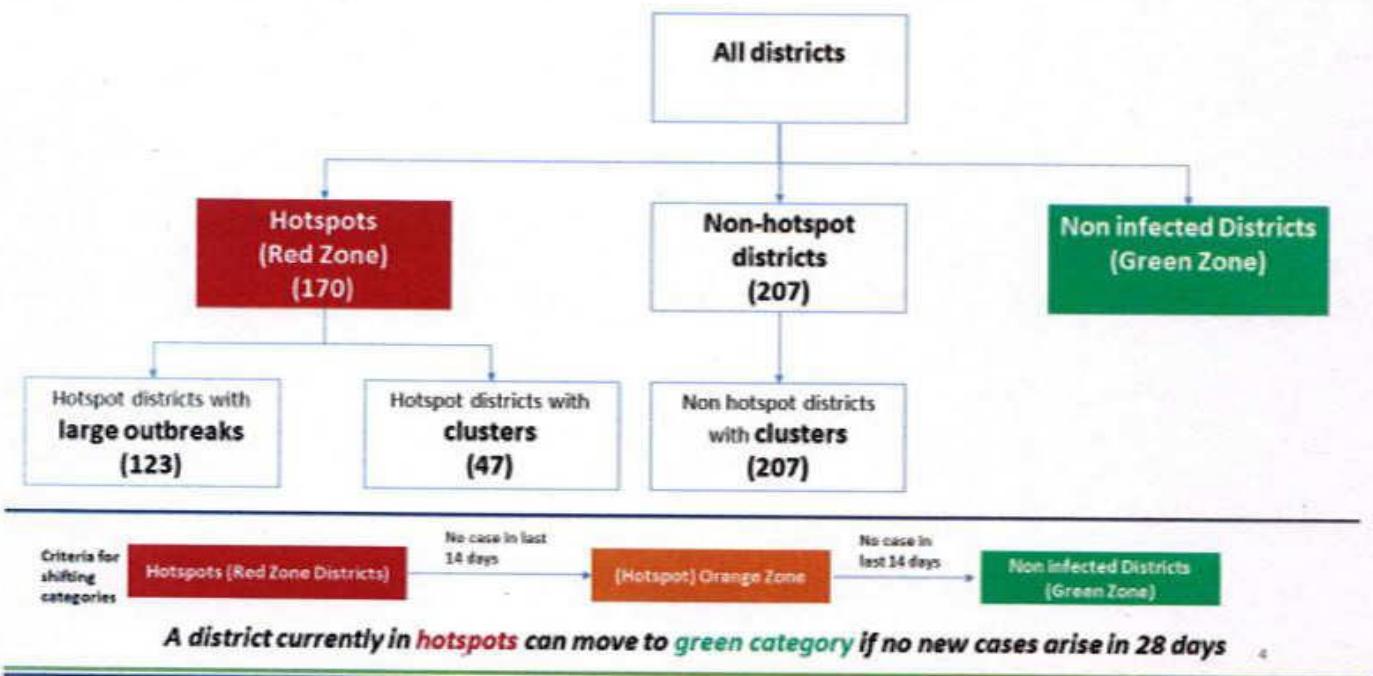
Which districts are under red zone?

Delhi and NCR, Mumbai, Nagpur, Pune, Thane, Yavatmal, Sangli, Buldhana, Ahmednagar, and Latur in Maharashtra, and Chennai, Chengalpattu, Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Erode, Dindigul, Karur, Madurai, Namakkal, Ranipet, Tiruchirapalli, Tiruppur and Theni in Tamil Nadu.

Demarcation of epicentre and containment zones:

A house with positive cases or a cluster with positive cases is marked as **the epicentre of the containment zone.** A radius of 0.5 km is taken and the area around it is cordoned off with only essential services available. Also, a **buffer zone** is marked where people with severe and acute respiratory illnesses (SARI) are checked and monitored.

Containment zones are created to map the local transmission of the disease and prevent the contagion from spreading.



Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/coronavirus-india-identifies-170-of-its-736-districts-as-covid-19-hotspots/article31350460.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

9. What is post-intensive care syndrome?

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Causes for the syndrome, effects and treatment.

Context: After leaving the ICU, many patients may suffer from what is known as **post-intensive care syndrome (PICS)**, which can happen to any person who has been in the ICU.

What is the concern now?

As per the WHO-China Joint Mission report that examined 55,924 laboratory-confirmed cases of Covid-19, over 6.1 per cent were classified as critical, which means they experienced respiratory failure, shock and multiple organ failure. **Many critical cases need ICU admissions.**

Therefore, for some Covid-19 patients who needed intensive care, **the journey to recovery is a long one.**

What is post-intensive care syndrome?

PICS is defined as **new or worsening impairment in physical (ICU-acquired neuromuscular weakness), cognitive (thinking and judgment), or mental health status** arising after critical illness and persisting beyond discharge from the acute care setting.

- Such patients may experience neuromuscular weakness, which can manifest itself in the form of poor mobility and recurrent falls.
- Psychological disability may arise in a person in the form of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

What are the symptoms?

The most common PICS symptoms are generalised weakness, fatigue, decreased mobility, anxious or depressed mood, sexual dysfunction, sleep disturbances and cognitive issues. These symptoms may last for a few months or many years after recovery.

What causes PICS?

A combination of factors can affect aspects of an ICU survivor's life.

1. PICS may be induced if a person was on prolonged mechanical ventilation, experienced sepsis, multiple organ failure and a prolonged duration of "bed-restore deep sedation".
2. 33 per cent of the people on ventilators may develop ICU-acquired muscle weakness (ICUAW). Along with this, 50 per cent of those who develop sepsis and up to 50 per cent of the patients who stay in the ICU for at least one week are also prone to ICUAW.
3. After leaving the ICU, over 30-80 per cent may develop problems related to cognitive function and other mental health issues, including difficulty in falling and staying asleep.

How to prevent?

1. It is recommended that to avoid PICS, patients' use of deep sedation is limited and early mobility is encouraged, along with giving them "aggressive" physical and occupational therapy.
2. Further, patients should be given the lowest dose of pain medications when possible, and should be put on lung or cardiovascular rehabilitation treatments along with treatments for depression, anxiety and PTSD.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-what-is-post-intensive-care-syndrome-some-covid-19-patients-may-be-vulnerable-to-6365752/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

10. Types of human coronaviruses

What to study?

For Prelims: Coronaviruses- types, virus types which affect humans, symptoms and recent examples.

For Mains: Impact of certain viruses and the need for better preparedness.

What are coronaviruses?

Coronaviruses are a large family of **single-stranded RNA viruses** that cause diseases in **animals and humans**.

- Broadly, **coronaviruses (CoV)** are the largest group of viruses that belong to the **Nidovirales order**, which includes **Coronaviridae** among three others.
- Coronavirinae are one of the two subfamilies of Coronaviridea, with the other being **Torovirinae**.
- **Coronavirinae** can be further **subdivided into alpha, beta, gamma and delta coronaviruses**.

These viruses are named so because of **spikes found on their surface that give them the appearance of a crown when looked through an electron microscope**.

The **first coronavirus was isolated in 1937** and it was the **infectious bronchitis virus (IBV)** that caused respiratory disease in chickens.

Coronaviruses which affect humans:

While there are hundreds of coronaviruses that cause diseases in animals such as pigs, camels, bats and cats, till date **seven different types of coronaviruses have been identified that infect humans**.

In the last two decades, more aggressive coronaviruses have emerged that are capable of causing serious illness and even death in humans. **These include SARS-CoV, MERS and now SARS-CoV-2**.

In 1965, **scientists DJ Tyrrell and ML Bynoe** were the first ones to identify a human coronavirus, which they isolated from the nasal washing of a male child who had symptoms of common cold. They termed the strain B814 and later in 1968 the term "**coronavirus**" was accepted.

Seven types that infect humans: Includes Two alpha coronaviruses (229E and NL63) and four beta coronaviruses (OC43, HKU1, MERS and SARS-CoV).

The sources:

Coronaviruses from all four categories can be found in mammals. But, **bat coronaviruses are the likely gene source of alpha and beta coronaviruses, while avian coronaviruses are the probable gene sources of gamma and delta coronaviruses**.

When the human coronaviruses were first identified?

229E: Discovered in 1967.

NL63 and HKU1: First identified in the Netherlands in 2004.

SARS-CoV: 2003 in China.

MERS: 2012 in Saudi Arabia (transmitted by dromedary camels).

SARS-CoV-2: 2019 in Wuhan (source not yet known, possibly bats).

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Can Coronavirus infect animals?
2. How are they classified?
3. Types of Corona affecting humans?
4. Why are they named so?
5. Their discovery?

Mains Link:

In the last two decades, more aggressive coronaviruses have emerged that are capable of causing serious illness and even death in humans. Discuss.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/types-of-human-coronaviruses-and-symptoms-6368444/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

11. How Kerala's Kasaragod has fought coronavirus?

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Overview of successful models in containing COVID 19 spread and how and why these models should be replicated across the country?

Context: Recently, the Centre showcased **the contact tracing and containment model of Kerala's Kasaragod**, one of the earliest spots on India's COVID-19 map, as one of the success stories of the containment exercise.

Why showcase Kasaragod?

Kasaragod reported the third case of COVID-19 in the country — a student airlifted from Wuhan on February 3. The district administration mounted a massive exercise to trace the 150-odd contacts of that one student.

- According to figures uploaded by the Kerala government, Kasaragod has had 169 cases and zero deaths until April 19, a unique achievement in itself, given the fact that a large proportion of the district's population have settled abroad.
- Of those infected, 123 people have recovered so far, leaving only 46 active cases among the original 169.

What is the Kasaragod model?

- It involves **aggressive testing, technology, foolproof contact tracing, and an effective public awareness campaign**.
- **A special officer** was appointed to coordinate functioning of the district administration and for effective coordination between line departments at field and secretariat levels.
- **Section 144** was imposed in the entire district, with seven drones employed for surveillance.
- Under the **Care for Kasaragod initiative**, a detailed action plan — common coordinated action plan — was drawn up for combating COVID-19 so that all stakeholders could turn to it when the situation arose.

As per the Action plan:

1. All quarantined people were tracked using GPS.
2. All essentials were home-delivered in the containment/cluster zones, irrespective of whether they were rich or poor.

3. A campaign on social distancing called “Break the Chain” was carried out to deliver the message of social distancing.
4. Core teams were formed with incident commanders to rush to various areas and take quick action.
5. It had a very strong social welfare component, which included free food kits for the poor and migrant workers, a strong check on hoarding and black-marketing, and health checkup on alternate days for migrants or the destitute.
6. Community kitchens supplied free food.
7. Jana Jagratha Samitis at the ward level ensured that the messaging reached every person.

Tests and quarantine measures:

1. A total of 17,373 people were quarantined. On an average, 100-150 samples were tested every day and new testing labs were started.
2. The medical college in Kasaragod with 200 beds and an ICU facility was operationalised in four days. There is also a 709-bed COVID-19 care centre.
3. ASHAs and health inspectors carried out household surveys.
4. All primary and secondary contacts of high-risk cases (those aged 60 or above) were quarantined in isolation centres. This was done as many homes did not have separate toilets.

What are the other successful models containment?

AGRA MODEL:

1. Under the cluster containment and outbreak containment plan in Agra, the district administration identified epicentres, delineated the impact of positive confirmed cases on the map, and deployed a special task force as per a micro plan made by the district administration.
2. The hotspots were managed through an active survey and containment plan. The “hotspot” area was identified within a radius of 3 km from the epicentre, while a 5 km buffer zone was identified as the containment zone.

BHILWARA MODEL:

1. This entailed complete isolation of Bhilwara city with Section 144 CrPC being imposed.
2. In the first phase, essential services were allowed; in the second phase, the shutdown was total with the city and district borders sealed and checkposts at every entry and exit point.
3. Trains, buses and cars were stopped. The district magistrates of neighbouring districts too were asked to seal their borders. The message from Bhilwara was “ruthless containment”.

PATHANAMTHITTA MODEL:

1. Kerala deployed technology to a large extent in the Pathanamthitta model too. Every person who had entered the district was screened and a database created so that they could be reached at short notice.
2. Graphics were created showing the travel route of the positive cases and publicised. This led to self-reporting. As people realised from the route maps and the travel times that they had come in contact with someone positive for COVID-19, many walked up to be screened or treated.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/kerala-coronavirus-cases-kasaragod-model-6371484/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

12. Classical swine fever

What to study?

For Prelims: About CSF, symptoms and prevention, the new vaccine.

For Mains: Significance and the need for new vaccines.

Context: More than 1,300 pigs have died across five districts of eastern Assam of **classical swine fever**.

What is Classical Swine Fever (CSF)?

Hog Cholera or Classical swine fever (CSF) is a contagious viral disease of domestic and wild swine.

- It happens due to the viruses that bring viral diarrhea in pigs and ailments in sheep.
- **The disease does not harm humans** but all-important precautions are advised to follow.

Concerns for India:

- Classical Swine Fever (CSF) is one of the biggest pigs' diseases in India. It causes a loss of about 400 crores of rupees per year in India. This has led to a decrease in the population of pigs in 2019.
- India currently requires 22 million doses of the CSF (Classical Swine Fever) vaccine every year. However, currently, only 1.2 million doses are being produced. The reason behind its less production is that only 50 doses can be prepared from the spleen of a rabbit.

Sources: the Hindu.

13. World Malaria Day

What to study?

For Prelims: Malaria- causes, symptoms and treatment, schemes in this regard.

For Mains: Concerns regarding malaria worldwide, need for unified approach.

Context: World Malaria Day 2020 is being celebrated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on April 25 with the theme 'Zero malaria starts with me'.

World Malaria Day was established on April 25 in 2007 by the 60th session of the World Health Assembly, WHO's decision-making body.

About Malaria:

Caused by a parasite that commonly infects a certain type of mosquito which feeds on humans.

Spread: Female *Anophelesmosquitoes* deposit parasite sporozoites into the skin of a human host.

Four kinds of malaria parasites infect humans:

Plasmodium falciparum, *P. vivax*, *P. ovale*, and *P. malariae*. In addition, *P. knowlesi*, a type of malaria that naturally infects macaques in Southeast Asia, also infects humans, causing malaria that is transmitted from animal to human ("zoonotic" malaria).

Numbers:

Malaria is a **leading cause of human morbidity and mortality**. Despite huge progress in tackling the disease, there are still 212 million new cases of malaria and 430,000 malaria-related deaths worldwide each year according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Most cases (80%) and deaths (90%) were in sub-Saharan African.

India's efforts in this regard:

India's progress in fighting malaria is an outcome of concerted efforts to ensure that its malaria programme is country-owned and country-led, even as it is in alignment with globally accepted strategies.

At the East Asia Summit in 2015, India pledged to **eliminate the disease by 2030**. Following this public declaration, India launched the **five-year National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination**. This marked a shift in focus from **malaria "control"** to **"elimination"**. The plan provides a roadmap to achieve the target of ending malaria in 571 districts out of India's 678 districts by 2022.

Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN) initiative:

- Among states, Odisha's **Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN)** initiative is significant.
- The initiative aims to deliver services to the most inaccessible and hardest hit people of the State. The initiative has in-built innovative strategies to combat asymptomatic malaria.
- The programme is **jointly implemented by Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Malaria Research (ICMR-NIMR), National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP), Odisha and Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV)**.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Difference and examples of various diseases caused by Virus and Bacteria.
2. Malaria- causes and treatment.

Sources: pib.

14. ADB's COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support (CARES) Program

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Overview and significance of the program.

Context: The Government of India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a \$1.5 billion loan agreement for the ADB's **COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Programme (CARES Programme)**.

It will be used to implement (i) COVID-19 containment plan to rapidly ramp up test-track-treatment capacity, and (ii) social protection for the poor, vulnerable, women, and disadvantaged groups to protect more than 800 million people over the next three months.

About ADB's COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support (CARES) Program:

Started to provide immediate requirements to governments in the face of this global crisis.

The CARES Programme is provided as the first support to meet the immediate requirements of the government.

The Program will contribute directly to the improvement of access to health facilities and care, as well as social protection for more than 800 million people.

The Program is funded through the **COVID-19 pandemic response option (CPRO)** under ADB's **Countercyclical Support Facility**.

The CARES Program will be provided with a USD 2 million technical assistance grant to support the government to strengthen its operational framework and efficient targeting, delivery, and monitoring and evaluation of its pro-poor economic package, as well as its health sector and social protection interventions.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Genesis and composition of ADB.
2. Funding and voting at ADB.
3. Types of loans.
4. What is countercyclical support facility?

Sources: pib.

15. What is a multi-system inflammatory state?

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Meaning, how it affects, symptoms and ways to prevent it.

Context: Doctors have picked up a slight rise in the number of children of all ages needing intensive care treatment for a condition called "**multi-system inflammatory state**".

The rise has happened over the past three weeks in London and elsewhere in the UK.

What is a multi-system inflammatory state?

It's a severe immune response that can affect the body in multiple ways, most importantly by **making the blood vessels leaky**, a condition called **Kawasaki disease**.

This leads to **low blood pressure and a build-up of fluid in the lungs and organs**.

It is extremely serious. Patients need urgent intensive care to support the heart, lungs and sometimes other organs such as the kidneys.

Are there other symptoms?

The children have overlapping symptoms of **toxic shock syndrome** (another extreme immune reaction) and unusual **Kawasaki disease**.

Other symptoms include abdominal pain, gastrointestinal problems and heart inflammation.

Causes:

There is no evidence that the condition is caused by any change in the virus, as that would have shown up in adults first.

But **it may be a post-infection inflammatory response** triggered by the coronavirus. This has been seen in adults, who tend to be more ill in the second phase of the infection, when the initial lung disease gives way to inflammatory damage.

Is this disease related to Covid-19?

Only some of the children with these symptoms tested positive for Covid-19. Therefore, it remains unclear if and how the inflammatory syndrome is related to the virus.

What is TSS?

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a rare life-threatening condition caused when certain bacteria enter the body and release harmful toxins. If not treated in time, the condition could be fatal. Symptoms include high temperature, flu-like symptoms including headache, sore throat, cough, diarrhea, dizziness or fainting, difficulty breathing and confusion. Some patients suffering from TSS may need ICU admissions.

What is Kawasaki disease?

Kawasaki disease is an acute inflammatory disease of the blood vessels and usually occurs in children below the age of five.

- The inflammation caused by the disease affects many parts of the body but has a more serious effect on the heart since it causes inflammation in the coronary arteries that are responsible for supplying blood to the heart.
- This results in enlargement or in the formation of aneurysms that can lead to heart attacks. Symptoms include fever, changes in extremities, rashes, redness of the cornea, red and cracked lips, a red tongue and lymph node enlargement of the neck.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is MSIM?
2. What is TSS?
3. What is Kawasaki disease?
4. Which organs are mainly affected by Corona Virus?
5. What is Cytokine storm?

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/coronavirus-europe-disease-children-multi-system-inflammatory-state-kawasaki-disease-6384601/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

1. RBI to set up Wing for banking fraud oversight

What to study?

For Prelims: RBI's power to set up such wings.

For Mains: Need for this wing, challenges and concerns and ways to address them.

Context: Reserve Bank of India is planning to set up exclusive wing for banking fraud oversight. Nothing official has been revealed in this regard.

What may be the composition of this wing?

It may have teams for meta-data processing and analysis, artificial intelligence analysis units, as well as proactive risk assessment cell.

Experts from the private sector working in all these domains will be roped in to train the new members in the fraud oversight wing.

Why there is a need for separate wing for fraud oversight?

After the loan fiasco at **Punjab National Bank**, the RBI had been mulling ways to pro-actively detect such frauds.

As part of that plan, the banking regulator had late last year moved to create a separate cadre of its own employees who would work in regulation and oversight sections.

With the latest **Yes Bank crisis**, it has been felt even more necessary to have such a wing at the earliest to protect the consumer interests.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

Powers of RBI wrt regulation of banking sector in the country.

Mains Link:

Discuss the need for having a separate wing to oversee banking fraud in India.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/business/banking-and-finance/reserve-bank-setting-up-exclusive-wing-for-banking-fraud-oversight-6348843/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. Online training platform- iGOT

What to study?

For Prelims: Key features of iGOT.

For Mains: Need for and significance of iGOT, concerns surrounding protection of frontline workers, ways to address them.

Context: The **Department of Personnel and Training** launches **online training platform- iGOT** in the fight against COVID-19.

The platform is called **iGOT — Integrated Government Online Training**.

What is it for?

It offers online training for doctors, nurses, paramedics, hygiene workers, technicians, Auxiliary Nursing Midwives (ANMS), central & state govt. officers, civil defence officials, various police organisations, National Cadet Corps (NCC), Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), National Service Scheme (NSS), Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS), Bharat Scouts & Guides (BSG) and other volunteers to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key features of the platform:

- It is set to be hosted on the Human Resources Development Ministry's **DIKSHA platform**.
- The iGOT platform delivers curated, role-specific content, to each learner at their place of work or home and to any device of their choice.

The platform currently hosts nine courses on topics like:

1. Basics of COVID.
2. ICU Care and Ventilation Management.
3. Clinical Management, Infection Prevention through PPE.
4. Infection Control and Prevention.
5. Quarantine and Isolation.
6. Laboratory Sample Collection and Testing.

7. Management of COVID 19 Cases.
8. COVID 19 Training.

Need for and significance of this platform:

India's first line of workers are already engaged in COVID-19 relief. But "a larger force will be needed to replace the first line" and to deal with "exponential or geometric increase" in COVID-19 positive cases in the subsequent stages of the pandemic.

Hence, the platform can be useful to combat COVID-19 for all front-line workers and equip them with the training and updates in coping with the pandemic. It provides a one-stop source to learn about critical areas and update their knowledge and capacity.

What is Diksha portal?

- DIKSHA Portal is **an initiative of HRD ministry** for providing a digital platform to teacher to make their lifestyle more digital.
- Diksha portal launched with a tagline "National Digital Infrastructures for Our Teachers Our Heroes".
- The portal will consist the whole teacher's life cycle – from the time they were enrolled as student teachers in Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs) to after they retire as teachers.
- Teacher can learn and train themselves for which assessment resources will be available.
- It will help teachers boost their teaching skills and create their own profile with their skills and knowledge.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. When and who launched Diksha portal?
2. Targeted groups of iGOT and Diksha.
3. Who are frontline workers in COVID 19 context?

Mains Link:

Discuss the features and significance of an Online training platform- iGOT launched recently by the Government of India.

Sources: pib.

3. What is contact tracing?

What to study?

For Prelims: Definition by WHO.

For Mains: Significance and its need amid COVID 19 spread, previous instances of its application.

Context: Global technology giants **Apple and Google** have announced that they are partnering on developing **contact tracing** technology to help governments and health authorities tackle the novel coronavirus pandemic. They are planning to build a **comprehensive solution that includes application programming interfaces (APIs) and operating system-level technology** to assist in enabling contact tracing.

Need for:

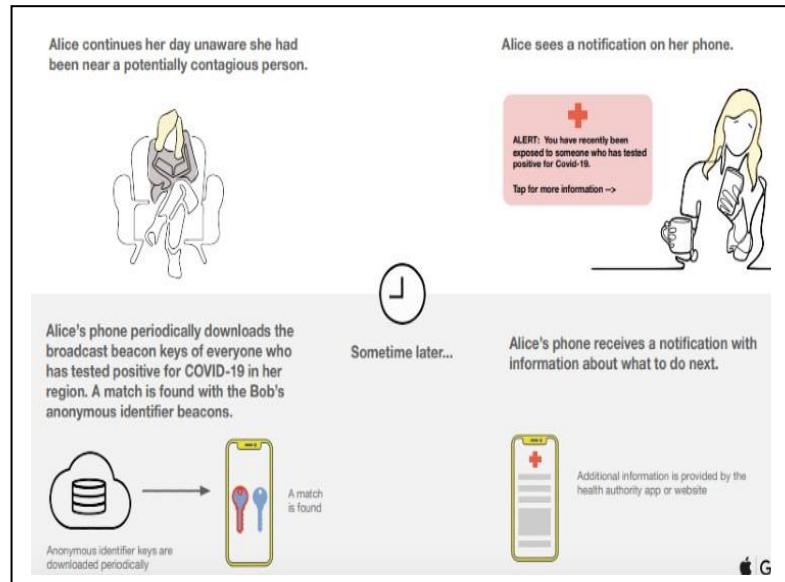
- Contact tracing is considered essential for bringing epidemics under control, and is expected to help governments in relaxing lockdown orders.
- Identifying people at the onset of symptoms and promptly isolating them reduces exposure to other persons.
- Via contact tracing, people who have come into contact with a person carrying a disease are alerted and identified.
- Additionally, prompt isolation and admission of the symptomatic person to a treatment facility decreases the delay to supportive treatment, which improves the likelihood of survival.

What is Contact tracing?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines contact tracing as **the process of identifying, assessing, and managing people who have been exposed to a disease to prevent onward transmission.**

How will the coronavirus new technology by Google and Apple work?

1. Phone-based matching via official apps will help alert people if they have come in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19.
2. For this to work, COVID-19 patients would have to declare their status to the respective apps voluntarily.
3. Following this, all people whose Android/iOS smartphones were detected nearby such patients, would get notified.
4. This means, you will be notified even if you were around a stranger who has tested positive for the disease.
5. Next, Bluetooth-based contact tracing will be built into the Android and iOS platforms, and users would be able to use the feature without downloading an app.



Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/apple-google-contact-tracing-technology-coronavirus-explained-6358183/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

4. World Press Freedom Index 2020

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: About the index and its indicators, performance of India and other countries and measures to ensure freedom of press.

Context: The World Press Freedom Index 2020 has been released by the media watchdog group **Reporters Without Borders**.

Norway ranks first for the fourth consecutive year and Finland and Denmark in second and third place.

Impact of Coronavirus pandemic:

1. The coronavirus pandemic may threaten press freedom and worsen the crises that reporters around the world are facing.
2. **The pandemic has already redefined norms.** The pandemic has allowed governments to take advantage of the fact that politics are on hold, the public is stunned and protests are out of the question, in order to impose measures that would be impossible in normal times.
3. United States and Brazil were becoming models of hostility toward the news media.
4. China, Iran and Iraq are criticised for censoring coverage of the coronavirus outbreak.

India's performance:

1. India has dropped two places to be ranked 142nd.
2. With no murders of journalists in India in 2019, as against six in 2018, the security situation for the country's media might seem, on the face of it, to have improved.

About World Press Freedom Index:

1. Published annually by Reporters Without Borders since 2002, the World Press Freedom Index measures the level of media freedom in 180 countries.
2. It is based on an evaluation of media freedom that measures pluralism, media independence, the quality of the legal framework and the safety of journalists.
3. It also includes indicators of the level of media freedom violations in each region.
4. It is compiled by means of a questionnaire in 20 languages that is completed by experts all over the world. This qualitative analysis is combined with quantitative data on abuses and acts of violence against journalists during the period evaluated.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. About Reporters Without Borders.
2. Performance of India and its neighbours.
3. Top and bottom performers.
4. Comparison of countries and their performance in previous years.

Mains Link:

The "coordinated hate campaigns" waged on social networks against journalists who dare to speak or write about subjects that annoy Hindutva followers are "alarming". Discuss.

Link:

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-ranks-142nd-on-global-press-freedom-index/articleshow/75279471.cms>.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

1. Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

What to study?

For Prelims: FATF, Grey list, G7.

For Mains: What is Grey list and Black list, how are countries in the list affected?

Context: The decision by a Pakistani court in Sindh to acquit Ahmed Omar Sheikh Saeed of murdering journalist Daniel Pearl will be raised by India at the next meeting of **the Financial Action Task Force**, where Pakistan's greylist status will come up for discussion.

The accused in the murder of a U.S. journalist had been released by India in 1999 in exchange for 155 hostages.

About FATF:

What is it? The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is **an inter-governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7**.

It is a **"policy-making body"** which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas.

The FATF **Secretariat is housed at the OECD headquarters in Paris**.

Roles and functions:

- Initially it was established to examine and develop measures to combat money laundering.
- In October 2001, the FATF expanded its mandate to incorporate efforts to combat terrorist financing, in addition to money laundering.
- In April 2012, it added efforts to counter the financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Composition:

The FATF currently comprises 37 member jurisdictions and 2 regional organisations, representing most major financial centres in all parts of the globe.

It also has observers and associate members.

Objectives:

To set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.

What is blacklist and grey list?

Black List: Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put in the blacklist. These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities. The FATF revises the blacklist regularly, adding or deleting entries.

Grey List: Countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list. This inclusion serves as a warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.

Considered in the grey list may face:

1. Economic sanctions from IMF, World Bank, ADB.
2. Problem in getting loans from IMF, World Bank, ADB and other countries.
3. Reduction in international trade.
4. International boycott.

Who is FATF President?

The FATF President is a senior official appointed by the FATF Plenary from among its members for a term of one year.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. G7 vs G8 vs G20.
2. Black vs Grey list.
3. Are FATF's decisions binding on member countries?
4. Who heads the FATF?
5. Where is its secretariat?

Mains Link:

What is the mandate and objectives of Financial Action Task Force? Discuss its importance for India – Pakistan relations.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GOF7AG0EA.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Additional trade barriers violate WTO's principle of non-discrimination:

China

What to study?

For Prelims: Latest FDI measures announced.

For Mains: Need for and significance of these measures, China's concerns.

Context: China has said that the additional barriers set by India for investors from specific countries violate World Trade Organisation's principle of non-discrimination, and go against the general trend of liberalisation and facilitation of trade and investment.

What is the issue?

In an April 17 decision, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry imposed restrictions saying **companies from countries that share borders with India can invest 'only under the government route'**.

The revised FDI policy was aimed at curbing opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions of Indian companies due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. But, it is expected to mainly hurt China. China's footprint in the Indian business space has been expanding rapidly, especially since 2014. The latest measures will prevent Chinese expansion in India.

What are China's concerns?

The amended policy makes every type of investment by Chinese investors subject to government approval. It **neither distinguishes between greenfield and brownfield investments nor listed and unlisted companies.** It also **does not distinguish between the different types of investors**, such as industry players, financial institutions, or venture capital funds.

Besides, making government approval necessary for acquisitions in private companies by Chinese investors will only **reduce the number of potential investors available for a prospective seller, and drive down the valuation.**

Such a blanket application could create unintended problems.

What has the China said?

The latest FDI measures by government of India do not conform to the consensus of G20 leaders and trade ministers to realise a **free, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment, and to keep our markets open.**

Companies make choices based on market principles and hence India should revise relevant discriminatory practices, treat investments from different countries equally, and foster an open, fair and equitable business environment.

The Principle of Non-Discrimination in International Trade Law (GATT perspective):

Non-discrimination is a key concept in WTO law, not to say is both central and essential to assuring the success of the multilateral trading system.

The principle of non-discrimination rests on two pillars: the most-favored nation (MFN) treatment obligation and the national treatment obligation.

The principle of non-discrimination is so fundamental for the balance of rights and obligations within the WTO that it continues to induce legal effects even when subject to certain exceptions.

How India defends its latest move?

India's tweaking FDI rules are **not in violation of WTO norms** that allow countries to make such changes when issues of national security are at stake.

India is not the only country to make such modifications in policy. Several countries in Europe had changed their laws or made new ones to cope with similar situations.

What provoked the government?

The Indian government appears to have been spooked by the People's Bank of China raising its stake in India's largest non-banking mortgage provider HDFC and amid warning calls by MSMEs to prevent a 'shopping spree' by Chinese investors of heavily discounted Indian companies.

What next?

While the government would term the move as an act of self-defence and one that follows global pattern, this pre-emptive economic strike would impact foreign investment inflows in India and could follow a Chinese retribution against Indian companies with investments in China.

However, in times of a global pandemic, one can hardly cast a shadow on the government's motive. As the country braces for the fallout of this decision, it is imperative for the government's bold move to be immediately followed by a **comprehensive FEMA notification and SEBI clarification that addresses the above concerns.**

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Latest FDI amendments?
2. What is the difference between automatic and government approved route?
3. Sectors in which FDI is not allowed?
4. Who decides on matters related to FDI in India?
5. Sectors in which 100% FDI is allowed.

Mains Link:

Discuss the rationale behind the recent FDI amendments. What are its impacts?

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/additional-trade-barriers-violate-wtos-principle-of-non-discrimination-china/article31386906.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Study on China dams brings the Brahmaputra into focus

What to study?

For Prelims: Key findings of the report, important dams in Mekong and Brahmaputra river, overview of these river basins.

For Mains: Impact of dams on people and ecology, ways to address them.

Context: China's upstream activities along **the Mekong River** have long been contentious — but a recent study has sparked fresh scrutiny over its dam-building exercises, reigniting **warnings that millions of livelihoods could be destroyed**.

The US funded study was carried out by research and consulting firm, **Eyes on Earth**.

The report was published by the UN-backed **Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership**, and the **Lower Mekong Initiative** — a multinational partnership of the U.S. with Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

Key findings and observations:

- China built its first dam on the upper Mekong in the 1990s and currently runs 11 dams along the river. The country has plans to build more dams, which are used to generate hydropower.
- These dams are holding back large amounts of water upstream on the Mekong, which exacerbated a severe drought in the Southeast Asian countries downstream last year.
- Some of those dams have compounded the alteration of the river's natural flow, resulting in the Lower Mekong recording some of its lowest river levels ever throughout most of the year.
- China's dam management is causing erratic and devastating changes in water levels downstream.
- Unexpected dam releases caused rapid rises in river level that have devastated communities downstream, causing millions in damage shocking the river's ecological processes.

Should India be worried?

India has long expressed concerns over dam-building on the Brahmaputra.

In 2015, China operationalised its **first hydropower project at Zangmu**, while three other dams at Dagu, Jiexu and Jiacha are being developed.

Indian officials have said the dams are not likely to impact the quantity of the Brahmaputra's flows because **they are only storing water for power generation**. Moreover, the Brahmaputra is not entirely dependent on upstream flows and an estimated 35% of its basin is in India.

But, **India does not have a water-sharing agreement with China**.

About Mekong:

The 4,350 kilometer (2,700 mile) **Mekong River runs through six countries**.

Starting from China — where it is called the Lancang River — it flows past countries like Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar, before emptying into the South China Sea via Vietnam.

It is the lifeblood of these Southeast Asian countries and supports the livelihood of nearly 200 million people there who depend largely on farming and fishing.



Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Countries through which Mekong flows.
2. Dams constructed across Mekong and Brahmaputra.
3. What is Brahmaputra called in China? Its tributaries.

4. Does India have any water sharing agreement with China?
5. Himalayan region through which these rivers pass.

Mains Link:

Discuss how China's upstream activities along the Mekong River have impacts on countries downstream and the ecology surrounding.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/study-on-china-dams-brings-the-brahmaputra-into-focus/article31466673.ece>

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

1. Euro Corona bonds

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: The proposal and its significance.

Context: Corona bonds could be a possible resolution to alleviate **Eurozone** financial struggles amid the coronavirus crisis. However, the idea has received mixed responses amongst the EU.

What are corona bonds?

Corona bonds would be a collective debt amongst EU member states, with the aim of providing financial relief to Eurozone countries battered by the coronavirus.

The funds would be mutualised and supplied by the European Investment Bank, with the debt taken collectively by all member states of the European Union.

What's the issue now?

Not all countries in the European Union (EU) are in favour of this idea. The idea of corona bonds has received reinforcement from nine EU countries, all keen to reach a financial solution as soon as possible.

However, there also remains steep opposition to the idea of corona bonds. The resistance has come most notably from **the 'Frugal Four'**. The Frugal Four consists of:

1. Germany.
2. The Netherlands.
3. Finland.
4. Austria.

What's the basis for opposition?

These countries are of the opinion that finance is an individual nation's responsibility. They believe that each EU member state should keep their finances in order.

Why have corona bonds?

- The advantage of corona bonds is that they would allow European countries to gain essential financial support.
- States could receive economic aid without expanding their national debt.
- If the EU member states were able to show a display of unity, this would likely strengthen confidence amongst Europe.

Concerns:

1. A disadvantage of corona bonds is that it would not necessarily enhance debt sustainability.
2. The concept would only aid future debt forgiveness, distinguishing between coronavirus related debt and legacy debt.
3. The implementation of a common bond amongst EU member states could also potentially take a lot of time. The delay is not ideal for countries who require access to funds immediately.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Euro zone Vs EU vs European Commission.
2. EU- composition, governance and members.

Mains Link:

Discuss how the proposed corona bond would help the Europe come out of the economic crisis brought about by the lockdown imposed because of COVID 19.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/euro-zone-coronabonds-explained-6351197/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. International Monetary and Finance Committee (IMFC)

What to study?

For Prelims: IMFC and Development committee.

For Mains: IMF and World Bank Group reforms.

Context: Union Minister of Finance & Corporate Affairs Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman recently attended through video-conference the Plenary Meeting of the **International Monetary and Financial Committee**.

- The discussions at the meeting were based on IMF Managing Director's Global Policy Agenda titled, "Exceptional Times – Exceptional Action".
- The members of the IMFC updated the committee on the actions and measures taken by member countries to combat COVID-19, and also remarked on IMF's crisis-response package to address global liquidity and members' financing needs.

About IMFC:

Composition: The IMFC has 24 members, drawn from the pool of 187 governors. Its structure mirrors that of the Executive Board and its 24 constituencies. As such, the IMFC represents all the member countries of the Fund.

Functions: The IMFC **meets twice a year**, during the Spring and Annual Meetings. The Committee discusses matters of common concern affecting the global economy and also advises the IMF on the direction its work.

At the end of the Meetings, the Committee issues a joint communiqué summarizing its views. These communiqués provide guidance for the IMF's work program during the six months leading up to the next Spring or Annual Meetings. There is no formal voting at the IMFC, which operates by consensus.

Significance:

1. The IMFC advises and reports to the IMF Board of Governors on the supervision and management of the international monetary and financial system, including on responses to unfolding events that may disrupt the system.
2. It also considers proposals by the Executive Board to amend the Articles of Agreement and advises on any other matters that may be referred to it by the Board of Governors.
3. Although the IMFC has no formal decision-making powers, in practice, it has become a key instrument for providing strategic direction to the work and policies of the Fund.

Insta Link:**Prelims Link:**

1. IMFC vs Development Committee- functions and composition.
2. Members and governance of IMF.
3. Various reports by IMF.
4. Funding mechanisms under IMF.

Mains Link:

Critically analyse the role, potential and performance of IMF in the present times.

Sources: pib.

3. Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)

What to study?

For Prelims: CTBT- key facts.

For Mains: Significance of the treaty and why India is not willing to sign the treaty, what needs to be done?

Context: A recent report issued by the United States State Department on “**Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments (Compliance Report)**” has raised concerns that China and Russia might be conducting nuclear tests in violation of its **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) undertakings**.

However, Russia and China have rejected the U.S.’s claims.

What is CTBT?

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is the Treaty **banning all nuclear explosions** – everywhere, by everyone. The Treaty was negotiated at **the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva** and adopted by the **United Nations General Assembly**. It opened for signature on 24 September 1996.

The Treaty will **enter into force after all 44 States listed in Annex 2 to the Treaty will ratify it**. These States had nuclear facilities at the time the Treaty was negotiated and adopted.

India, North Korea and Pakistan have not yet signed the Treaty.

What is a “zero yield”?

A **comprehensive test ban** has been defined as a “zero yield” test ban that would prohibit supercritical hydro-nuclear tests but not sub-critical hydrodynamic nuclear tests.

Why is the CTBT so important?

The CTBT is the last barrier on the way to develop nuclear weapons. It curbs the development of new nuclear weapons and the improvement of existing nuclear weapon designs. The Treaty provides a legally binding norm against nuclear testing. The Treaty also helps prevent human suffering and environmental damages caused by nuclear testing.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/at-the-edge-of-a-new-nuclear-arms-race/article31439692.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. What is 1930s Great Depression?

What to study?

For Prelims: Great Depression- occurrence, reasons and impact.

For Mains: Lessons learnt and it's impact on world economy and on India's freedom struggle.

Context: With the novel coronavirus pandemic severely affecting the global economy, some experts have begun comparing the current crisis with the **Great Depression** — the devastating economic decline of the 1930s that went on to shape countless world events.

What was the Great Depression?

The Great Depression was a major economic crisis that began in the United States in 1929, and went to have a worldwide impact until 1939.

It began on October 24, 1929, a day that is referred to as **“Black Thursday”**, when a monumental crash occurred at the New York Stock Exchange as stock prices fell by 25 per cent.

How it began?

While the Wall Street crash was triggered by minor events, the extent of the decline was due to more deep-rooted factors such as a fall in aggregate demand, misplaced monetary policies, and an unintended rise in inventory levels.

Impacts:

1. In the United States, prices and real output fell dramatically. Industrial production fell by 47 per cent, the wholesale price index by 33 per cent, and real GDP by 30 per cent.
2. The havoc caused in the US spread to other countries mainly due to the gold standard, which linked most of the world's currencies by fixed exchange rates.
3. In almost every country of the world, there were massive job losses, deflation, and a drastic contraction in output.
4. Unemployment in the US increased from 3.2 per cent to 24.9 per cent between 1929 and 1933. In the UK, it rose from 7.2 per cent to 15.4 per cent between 1929 and 1932.
5. The Depression caused extreme human suffering, and many political upheavals took place around the world.
6. In Europe, economic stagnation that the Depression caused is believed to be the principal reason behind the rise of fascism, and consequently the Second World War.
7. It had a profound impact on institutions and policymaking globally, and led to the gold standard being abandoned.

How did Great Depression impact India?

1. Due to the global crisis, there was a drastic fall in agricultural prices, the mainstay of India's economy, and a severe credit contraction occurred as colonial policymakers refused to devalue the rupee.
2. The decline of agricultural prices, which was aggravated by British financial policy in India, made substantial sections of the peasantry rise in protest and this protest was articulated by members of the National Congress.
3. The effects of the Depression became visible around the harvest season in 1930, soon after Mahatma Gandhi had launched the Civil Disobedience movement in April the same year.
4. There were "No Rent" campaigns in many parts of the country, and radical Kisan Sabhas were started in Bihar and eastern UP.
5. Agrarian unrest provided a groundswell of support to the Congress, whose reach was yet to extend into rural India.
6. The endorsement by farming classes is believed to be among the reasons that enabled the party to achieve its landslide victory in the 1936-37 provincial elections held under the Government of India Act, 1935— which significantly increased the party's political might for years to come.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/coronavirus-lockdown-economy-crisis-great-depression-explained-6347511/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. EU €500bn corona rescue deal

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Key features and overview of the deal.

Context: The European Union (EU) has unveiled a grand **€500bn corona rescue deal** to cushion the impact of the coronavirus pandemic across Europe.

The deal is on **safety nets for workers, businesses and public finances, as well as on a recovery plan.**

What are the measures for people and firms?

1. A safety net for healthcare systems.
2. Safety nets for workers and the self-employed.

3. Access to the European Stability Mechanism (ESM): Governments can apply for access to a total of €240 billion being made available under ESM, the bailout fund created during the eurozone debt crisis.
4. Under the safety net for companies, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are to be helped via an EU-wide loan scheme.

Other recently announced measures:

1. The new measures come on top of money channelled by national governments to bolster health and other public services, and support workers and industries.
2. Countries have also pledged to make sure sectors in trouble have access to cash, via public guarantees and deferred tax payments.
3. Last month the European Central Bank announced a package worth €750 billion to buy up government and company debt across the eurozone.

What isn't addressed by the measures?

- The rescue package concerns only short-term economic measures to deal with the immediate impact of the coronavirus pandemic.
- But it does not deal with the thorny question of how to pay for the longer-term reconstruction effort in the aftermath.
- There are big disagreements over how what's called the "EU Recovery Fund" will take shape.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What are Corona Bonds?
2. EU vs Eurozone vs European Council.

Mains Link:

How European nations are dealing with the economic crisis caused due to lockdown imposed in wake of the COVID 19 spread? Discuss.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Who are the developing countries in the WTO?

What to study?

For Prelims: Categories of countries in WTO.

For Mains: Need for, implicating, significance and concerns.

Context: US president has asked for changing the WTO rules for changing the developing country status of China.

Trump has accused China of taking advantage of the US through the World Trade Organisation (WTO), saying that if Beijing is considered a 'developing country', the US should be called one too.

Should China still be classified as a developing nation? What are the implications?

China became a WTO member in 2001. By 2011, China became the second-largest economy in GDP terms, the first largest merchandise exporter, the fourth largest commercial services exporter and the first destination for inward FDI among developing countries.

So if China is forced to take on the duties of a developed country and forego the benefits of a developing country, the West could soon ask other developing countries that are ahead of China (at least in per capita terms) to do the same.

Who are the developing countries in the WTO?

There are no WTO definitions of "developed" and "developing" countries.

- Members announce for themselves whether they are "developed" or "developing" countries.

- However, **other members can challenge** the decision of a member to make use of provisions available to developing countries.

What are the advantages of “developing country” status?

Developing country status in the WTO brings **certain rights**.

Developing country status ensures **special and differential treatment (S&DT) or provisions** which allow them more time to implement agreements and commitments, include measures to increase trading opportunities, safeguard their trade interests, and support to build capacity to handle disputes and implement technical standards.

WTO norms for recognition of Developed, Developing and LDCs:

- Under the WTO system, generally, countries are designated as **developed, developing, and least developed countries (LDCs)**.
- The **uneven level of development** between developed and developing countries in the WTO is a well-recognised fact.
- **Article XVIII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)** recognises that attaining the objectives of this agreement would require facilitating the progressive development of those countries that can only support low levels of development and are at the early stages of development.
- Accordingly, **countries self-designate themselves as ‘developing country’ to take advantage of provisions like Article XVIII of GATT and other special and differential treatment (S&DT) provisions** in the WTO agreements.
- These provisions are aimed at increasing trade opportunities for developing countries, ensuring longer transitional periods to comply with WTO obligations, and affording technical assistance to countries, among other things.

What are “special and differential treatment” provisions?

1. Longer time periods for implementing Agreements and commitments,
2. Measures to increase trading opportunities for developing countries,
3. Provisions requiring all WTO members to safeguard the trade interests of developing countries,
4. Support to help developing countries build the capacity to carry out WTO work, handle disputes, and implement technical standards, and
5. Provisions related to least-developed country (LDC) Members.
6. The concept of **non-reciprocal preferential treatment** for developing countries that when developed countries grant trade concessions to developing countries, they should not expect the developing countries to make matching offers in return.

Demands by developed countries:

For sometime now, developed countries, mainly the US, have been asking the WTO to end the benefits being given to developing countries.

Nearly two-thirds of the members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) have been able to avail themselves of special treatment and to take on weaker commitments under the WTO framework by designating themselves as developing countries.

Matter of choice

WTO allows member countries to classify themselves as “developed” or “developing”. However, other members can challenge the decision of a country to be classified as “developing”. Only the “least-developed countries” status is designated by the UN. Countries in the three lists:

Developing	Developed	Least-developed countries
India	U.S.	Afghanistan
China	European Union	Bangladesh
Russia	Japan	Bhutan
Brazil	Canada	Myanmar
South Africa	Australia	Nepal
South Korea	New Zealand	South Sudan

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Definition by WTO in this regard?
2. What is non-reciprocal preferential treatment?
3. What is special and differential treatment (S&DT)?
4. WTO- membership and composition?

Mains Link:

Have India, China taken 'tremendous advantage' of their developing country status in the global economy? Discuss.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/donald-trump-china-wto-developing-status-trade-body-rules-explained-6358130/>.

Sources: down to earth.

4. Special Drawing Rights (SDR)

What to study?

For Prelims: SDR- meaning, objectives, composition and features.

For Mains: Significance of SDRs.

Context: India is not supporting a general allocation of new **Special Drawing Rights (SDR)** by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) because it feels it might not be effective in easing COVID-19-driven financial pressures. The new SDR allocation was supposed to provide all 189 members with new foreign exchange reserves with no conditions.

What's the reason?

Such a major liquidity injection could produce potentially costly side-effects if countries used the funds for "extraneous" purposes.

What is a Special Drawing Right (SDR)?

The SDR is an **international reserve asset**, created by the IMF in 1969 to supplement its member countries' official reserves.

The value of the SDR is based on a basket of five currencies—the U.S. dollar, the euro, the Chinese renminbi, the Japanese yen, and the British pound sterling.

So far SDR 204.2 billion (equivalent to about US\$281 billion) have been allocated to members, including SDR 182.6 billion allocated in 2009 in the wake of the global financial crisis.

The role of the SDR:

1. The SDR was created as a **supplementary international reserve asset** in the context of the Bretton Woods fixed exchange rate system.
2. The SDR serves as the **unit of account of the IMF and some other international organizations**.
3. The SDR is **neither a currency nor a claim on the IMF**. Rather, it is a **potential claim on the freely usable currencies of IMF members**.
4. SDRs **can be exchanged for these currencies**.

Review:

The SDR basket is **reviewed every five years, or earlier if warranted**, to ensure that the basket reflects the relative importance of currencies in the world's trading and financial systems.

The reviews cover the key elements of the SDR method of valuation, including criteria and indicators used in selecting SDR basket currencies and the initial currency weights used in determining the amounts (number of units) of each currency in the SDR basket.

	Current basket	As of 1 October 2016
USD	41,9	41,73
EUR	37,4	30,93
JPY	9,4	8,33
GBP	11,3	8,09
RMB	N.A.	10,92

Source: IMF.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is SDR?
2. SDR basket includes?
3. When is it reviewed?
4. What are IMF quotas?
5. Can SDR be exchanged for any currency?

Mains Link:

What do you understand by Special Drawing Rights (SDR)? Discuss their significance and key features.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GFJ7BPMEK.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. Why oil prices fell below zero?

What to study?

For Prelims: Meaning of below zero prices, what is WTI, how oil prices are determined?

For Mains: Why oil prices are falling, Impact of the fall in prices, implications on other countries including India, measures to address the situation.

What's the issue?

Prices of **West Texas Intermediate (WTI) in the US**, recently fell to “minus” \$40.32 a barrel.

- This **the lowest crude oil price ever recorded** (the previous lowest was immediately after World War II).
- At this price, **the seller of crude oil would be paying the buyer \$40 for each barrel that is bought.**

But, What Negative Oil Prices Really Mean?

Firstly, **WTI oil is traded as futures contracts** in the NYMEX (New York Mercantile Exchange) where traders buy and sell monthly futures such as, for instance, May futures, June futures and so on.

The contract for **West Texas intermediate crude, or WTI**, is the benchmark for US crude oil prices. On Monday, it crashed 300 per cent from US\$17.85 a barrel to minus US\$37.63.

1. The price of a barrel of crude varies based on factors such as supply, demand and quality. Supply of fuel has been far above demand since the coronavirus forced billions of people to stop travelling.
2. Because of oversupply, storage tanks for WTI are becoming so full it is difficult to find space.
3. Each contract trades for a month, with the May contract due to expire on Tuesday. Investors holding May contracts didn't want to take delivery of the oil and incur storage costs, and in the end had to pay people to take it off their hands.

Why the oil prices are falling?

Situation prior to COVID-19 outbreak:

1. Even before the COVID-19 outbreak induced lockdowns across the world, crude oil prices had been falling over the past few months.
2. The reason was too much supply and too little demand.
3. In early March, Saudi Arabia and Russia disagreed over the production cuts required to keep prices stable.
4. As a result, oil-exporting countries, led by Saudi Arabia, started undercutting each other on price while continuing to produce the same quantities of oil.
5. This was an unsustainable strategy under normal circumstances but what made it even more calamitous was the growing spread of novel coronavirus disease, which, in turn, was sharply reducing economic activity and the demand for oil.

Post- lockdown:

1. With each passing day, the developed countries were falling prey to COVID-19 and with each lockdown, there were fewer flights, cars and industries etc. using oil.
2. This meant that the supply-demand mismatch continued to worsen right through March and April.

How will this impact India?

The Indian crude oil basket does not comprise WTI — it only has **Brent and oil from some of the Gulf countries** — so there is no direct impact.

But oil is traded globally and weakness in WTI is mirrored in the falling prices of the Indian basket as well.

There are two ways in which this lower price can help India:

1. If the government passes on the lower prices to consumers, then, whenever the economic recovery starts in India, individual consumption will be boosted.
2. If, on the other hand, governments (both at the Centre and the states) decide to levy higher taxes on oil, it can boost government revenues.

What is Benchmark crude?

It is a crude oil that serves as a reference price for buyers and sellers of crude oil.

There are **three primary benchmarks**, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), Brent Blend, and Dubai Crude.

Other well-known blends include the OPEC Reference Basket used by OPEC, Tapis Crude which is traded in Singapore, Bonny Light used in Nigeria, Urals oil used in Russia and Mexico's Isthmus.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Important oil and gas exploration blocks in India.
2. Difference between WTI, Brent and Dubai Crude.
3. Largest oil producers and exporters.
4. India's oil imports.
5. How oil is traded?

Mains Link:

What do negative oil prices mean for the economy and consumers? Discuss.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/why-crude-oil-prices-fell-below-zero-6373139/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

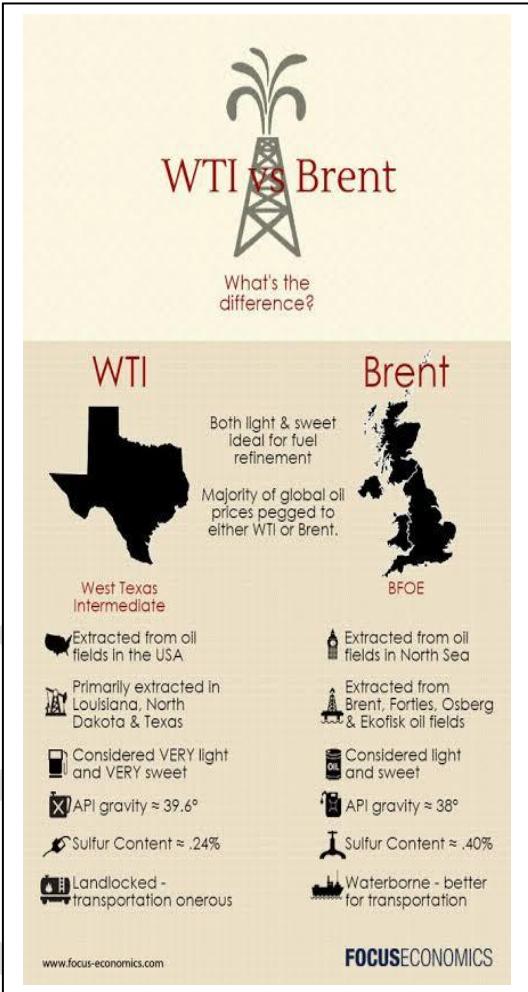
6. World Bank report on remittances

What to study?

For Prelims: Remittances- inward and outward- country- wise.

For Mains: Significance of remittances and challenges therein.

Context: The World Bank has released a report on the impact of the COVID-19 on migration and remittances.



India specific observations:

Remittances to India are likely to drop by 23 per cent from \$83 billion last year to \$64 billion this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, which has resulted in a global recession.

India's neighbourhood:

1. In Pakistan, the projected decline is about 23 per cent, totalling about \$17 billion, compared to a total of \$22.5 billion last year, when remittances grew by 6.2 per cent.
2. In Bangladesh, remittances are projected at \$14 billion this year, a likely fall of about 22 per cent.
3. Remittances to Nepal and Sri Lanka are expected to decline by 14 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively, this year.

India's remittances:

- India is the world's biggest recipient of remittances.
- In 2019, India is estimated to have received \$83.1 billion in remittances from people working overseas, about 12% of the total expected global inflow.
- International remittances in 2018 (2020 report) reached \$689 billion, out of which India received \$78.6 billion from the 17.5 million living abroad.

Global scenario:

Globally remittances are projected to decline sharply by about 20 per cent this year due to the economic crisis induced by the pandemic and shutdowns.

The projected fall is largely due to a fall in the wages and employment of migrant workers, who tend to be more vulnerable to loss of employment and wages during an economic crisis in a host country.

Remittance flows are expected to fall across all World Bank Group regions, most notably in Europe and Central Asia (27.5 per cent), followed by Sub-Saharan Africa (23.1 per cent), South Asia (22.1 per cent), the Middle East and North Africa (19.6 per cent).

Significance of remittances:

Studies show that remittances alleviate poverty in lower- and middle-income countries, improve nutritional outcomes, are associated with higher spending on education, and reduce child labor in disadvantaged households. They are a vital source of income for developing countries.

A fall in remittances affect families' ability to spend on these areas as more of their finances will be directed to solve food shortages and immediate livelihoods needs.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. India's top sources of remittances.
2. Past 10 years trend.
3. Indian diaspora across the world- top 3 countries.
4. What are FCNR accounts?

Link:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/22/world-bank-predicts-sharpest-decline-of-remittances-in-recent-history>.

Sources: World Bank.

Decline due to drop in wages, job losses

Remittances important as steep fall likely in FDI

Cost of remittance still high



7. South China Sea dispute

What to study?

For Prelims: What is the dispute all about, countries involved.

For Mains: Concerns of various countries involved in the dispute, ways to address them.

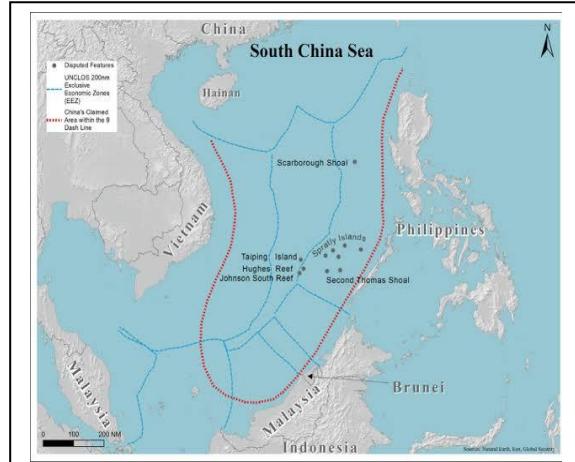
Context: In the middle of the global coronavirus pandemic, **China has been busy increasing its presence in the South China Sea.**

If the dispute were to aggravate, Asia-Pacific researchers believe it could have serious consequences for diplomatic relations and stability in the region.

What's the issue now?

The focus this time is on two disputed archipelagos of the **Spratly Islands** and the **Paracel Islands** in the middle of the South China Sea waters, between the territory of Vietnam and the Philippines.

Beijing unilaterally renamed 80 islands and other geographical features in the area, drawing criticism from neighbouring countries who have also laid claim to the same territory.



What is the Spratly Islands dispute about?

- The ongoing territorial dispute is between **China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia** concerning the ownership of the Spratly Islands archipelago and nearby geographical features like corals, reefs, cays etc.
- Brunei** has contained its objections to the use of its maritime waters for commercial fishing.
- The islands may have **large reserves of untapped natural resources including oil**.

What is the Paracel Islands dispute about?

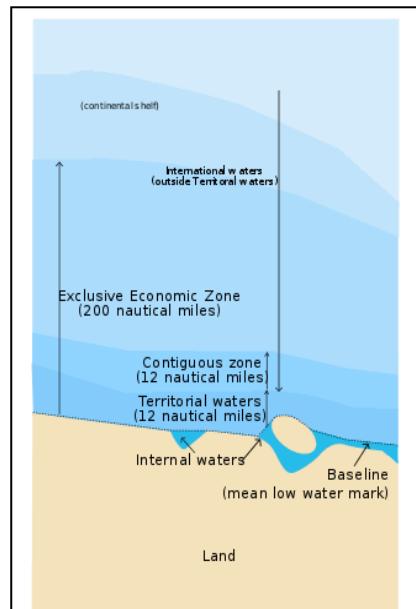
Located in the South China Sea, almost **equidistant from China and Vietnam**.

Beijing says that references to the Paracel Islands as a part of China sovereign territory can be found in **14th century writings from the Song Dynasty**.

Vietnam on the other hand, says that historical texts from at least **the 15th century show that the islands were a part of its territory**.

With increased tensions accelerated by **Colonial powers**, China and Vietnam fought over their territorial disputes in January 1974 after which **China took over control of the islands**.

- In retaliation, in 1982, Vietnam said it had extended its administrative powers over these islands.
- In 1999, Taiwan jumped into the fray laying its claim over the entire archipelago.
- Since 2012, China, Taiwan and Vietnam have attempted to reinforce their claims on the territory by engaging in construction of government administrative buildings, tourism, land reclamation initiatives and by establishing and expanding military presence on the archipelago.



Understanding UNCLOS:

United Nation Convention on the Laws of the Sea defines the rights, responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of world's oceans, establishing guidelines for businesses, environment, and the management of marine natural resources.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

- Countries involved in the dispute.
- What is nine dash line?

3. Disputed islands and their locations?
4. Important straits, passes and seas in the region.
5. What is UNCLOS?

Mains Link:

Write a note on South China Sea dispute.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/diplomatic-tensions-in-south-china-sea-islands-paracel-spratly-6380035/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

8. What is an “immunity passport”?

What to study?

For Prelims: What are they? What are antibodies? How are they tested?

For Mains: Significance of these passports, concerns associated and alternatives Available.

Context: A few countries have started considering issuing “immunity passports” or some kind of certificates indicating a person has immunity to COVID-19.

However, the World Health Organization has warned against idea of 'immunity passports'.

What is an “immunity passport”?

The idea for the “immunity passport” or a “back to work” pass is this: If you’ve been infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and recover, then you have immunity that will protect you from getting the disease again for some amount of time.

Why is WHO against this idea?

1. It says there is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from COVID-19 and have antibodies are protected against a second infection.
2. Some experts think that it may be too soon to consider it.
3. Many have criticised the scheme as both scientifically and ethically controversial.
4. Lack of necessary information would make categorising between immune and non-immune persons a challenging as well as potentially dangerous task.
5. There are also logistical problems, as not enough test kits are still available around the world to be able to issue such certificates on a large scale. Also, many researchers continue to remain sceptical about entirely relying on antibody tests to issue certificates.
6. At the same time, experts have said that issuing such certificates would create resentment among members of the community, and raise the possibility of stigmatisation.

Why such strategies are needed now?

The coronavirus pandemic has now shut down the activities and economies in many countries that are experiencing increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases.

- Immunity passports would help us get out of stay-at-home orders and economic shutdown.
- In theory, people who have an immunity passport could safely return to work because they would not get sick again and start passing the virus around. Then business and activity could slowly return to normal.

Link:

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2020/apr/25/world-health-organization-warns-against-idea-of-immunity-passports-2135155.html>.

Sources: Indian Express.

9. USCIRF 2020 annual report

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Findings, concerns for India and relevance.

Context: The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has released its 2020 report.

About USCIRF:

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan federal government entity established by the U.S. Congress to monitor, analyze and report on threats to religious freedom abroad.

It makes foreign policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress intended to deter religious persecution and promote freedom of religion and belief.

Highlights of the report:

India- specific:

- **India is at the lowest ranking, “countries of particular concern” (CPC).**
- This is **the first time since 2004 that India has been placed in this category.**
- India is **placed alongside countries, including China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.**
- India was categorised as a “**Tier 2 country**” in last year’s listing.

Reasons for this downgrade:

- Concerns about the Citizenship Amendment Act, the proposed National Register for Citizens, anti-conversion laws and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The national government used its strengthened parliamentary majority to institute national-level policies violating religious freedom across India, especially for Muslims.
- Besides, national and various State governments also allowed nationwide campaigns of harassment and violence against religious minorities to continue with impunity, and engaged in and tolerated hate speech and incitement to violence against them.

Recommendations made by USCIRF to US government:

Take stringent action against India under the “**International Religious Freedom Act**” (IRFA).

Impose **targeted sanctions** on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals’ assets and/or barring their entry into the United States under human rights-related financial and visa authorities, citing specific religious freedom violations.

How effective can these recommendations be?

In 2005, Prime Minister Narendra Modi who was at the time the Chief Minister of Gujarat was censured by the USCIRF. The commission had recommended sanctions against Mr. Modi for the 2002 riots and the U.S. government had subsequently cancelled his visa.

How are other countries placed in the report?

- In the 2020 Annual Report, USCIRF recommends **14 countries to the State Department for designation as “countries of particular concern” (CPCs)** because their governments engage in or tolerate “systematic, ongoing, egregious violations.”
- **These include nine that the State Department designated as CPCs in December 2019**—Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan—as well as five others—India, Nigeria, Russia, Syria, and Vietnam.
- Instead of using its own “Tier 2” category, as in past reports, the 2020 Annual Report also recommends **15 countries for placement on the State Department’s Special Watch List (SWL) for severe violations.**
- These include four that the State Department placed on that list in December 2019—Cuba, Nicaragua, Sudan, and Uzbekistan—as well as 11 others—Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Central African Republic (CAR), Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, and Turkey.
- The Report recommends **six non-state actors for designation as “entities of particular concern” (EPCs)** for systematic, ongoing, egregious violations. These consist of five groups that the State Department designated in December 2019—al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Houthis in Yemen, Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) in Afghanistan, and the Taliban in Afghanistan—plus one other—Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria.

Important Terms and definitions:

Tier 2 countries are those in which violations engaged in or tolerated by government are serious and characterized by at least one of the elements of systematic, ongoing, and egregious (horrible').

CPC is designated to a nation guilty of particularly severe violations of religious freedom under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998. The term 'particularly severe violations of religious freedom' means systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What kind of organisation is USCIRF?
2. What are Countries of Particular Concern?
3. What are Tier 2 countries?
4. Countries places alongside India in the latest report.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/uscirf-downgrades-india-in-2020-list/article31457624.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

10. Global Terrorism Index (GTI)

What to study?

For Prelims: GTI- rankings, database and latest report highlights.

For Mains: Concerns expressed by India.

Context: Niti Aayog has questioned Australian institute's terror ranking of India in its **Global Terrorism Index of 2019**.

It has questioned the methodology adopted **to rank India as the seventh worst terrorism affected country** ahead of conflict-ridden countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Palestine and Lebanon.

It also questions the opaque funding of **the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)**.

What's the issue?

India has moved to **the seventh position from the previous year's eighth in the annual Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2019**. The countries ahead of it are Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan and Somalia.

- Following this, in March, the Cabinet Secretariat asked Niti Aayog to track 32 such global indices to see how they could help drive reforms and growth.
- It is because the positioning in the global indices impacted investments and other opportunities.

About Global Terrorism Index:

- The GTI report issued by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) is based primarily on the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) collated by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland, besides other sources.
- The index provides a comprehensive summary of the key global trends and patterns in terrorism since 2000. It produces a composite score in order to provide an ordinal ranking of countries on the impact of terrorism.
- The GTI is based on data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) which is collected and collated by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland.

What GTI rankings matter?

GTI scores are directly used in the Global Peace Index, the Global Slavery Report published by the Walk Free Foundation, and indirectly used in computing country scores in the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness and Global Competitiveness Indices and compilation of Safe Cities Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who releases GTI?
2. Who releases GTD?
3. How are countries ranked?
4. India's ranking comparison?

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/niti-aayog-questions-australian-institutes-terror-ranking-of-india/article31455989.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

11. Annual Special 301 report

What to study?

For prelims: special 301 report, what is priority watch list?

For mains: why is India placed under this list, concerns, implications and what needs to be done?

Context: The United States Trade Representative (USTR) has released its **Annual Special 301 Report**.

What is Special 301 Report?

- It is prepared annually by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) that identifies trade barriers to United States companies and products due to the intellectual property laws, such as copyright, patents and trademarks, in other countries.
- It is published pursuant to **Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974**.
- The Report includes a list of "**Priority Foreign Countries**", that are judged to have inadequate intellectual property laws; these countries may be subject to sanctions.
- In addition, the report contains a "**Priority Watch List**" and a "**Watch List**", containing countries whose intellectual property regimes are deemed of concern.

Observations made about India in the latest report:

- India continues to be on the '**Priority Watch List**' for **lack of adequate intellectual property (IP) rights protection and enforcement**.
- While India made "meaningful progress" to enhance IP protection and enforcement in some areas over the past year, **it did not resolve recent and long-standing challenges, and created new ones**. The same assessment was made in the 2019 report.

What are the unresolved issues as per the report?

1. Innovators being able to receive, maintain and enforce patents particularly in the pharmaceutical sector.
2. Concerns over copyright laws not incentivising the creation and commercialisation of content.
3. An outdated trade secrets framework.
4. Restrictions on transparency of information provided on state-issued pharmaceutical manufacturing licenses
5. Restrictive patentability criteria to reject pharmaceutical patents.
6. Absence of an effective system for protecting against the unfair commercial use.
7. High customs duties on medical devices and Information and Communications Technology.
8. Weak enforcement by courts and the police, and Lack of familiarity with investigative techniques and no centralised IP enforcement agency.
9. India was ranked among the top five source economies for fake goods by the Organization of Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) in 2019.
10. Trademark counterfeiting levels were "problematic" and there were "excessive delays" in obtaining trademarks due to a lack of examination quality.
11. The government's **2019 draft Copyright Amendment Rules**, if implemented, would have "severe" consequences for Internet-content rights holders, as the proposed rules broadened the scope of compulsory licensing from radio and television broadcasting to online broadcasting.

Demands by the USTR:

It has urged India to join the **Singapore Treaty on the Law of Trademarks**, a treaty that harmonises trademark registration.

- The treaty was adopted in Singapore on 28 March 2006. It **entered into force on 16 March 2009**.
- As of July 2016, there are **50 contracting parties to the treaty**, which includes 48 states plus the **African Intellectual Property Organization and the Benelux Organization for Intellectual Property**.
- It **includes provisions** on the recording of trademark licenses, and establishes maximum requirements for requests for recordal, amendment or cancellation of the recordal of a license etc.
- The Treaty is **open to States members of WIPO and to certain intergovernmental organizations**.

What about other countries?

Algeria, Argentina, Chile, China, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and Venezuela are also on the Priority Watch List.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is priority watch list and watch list?
2. Impact on countries placed in this list.
3. India's position last year vs this year.
4. What is USTR?
5. What is WIPO?
6. What is the Singapore Treaty on the Law of Trademarks?
7. What is 2019 draft Copyright Amendment Rules?

Mains Link:

Discuss the impact of observations made by the USTR Special 301 report on India.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/intellectual-property-rights-india-remains-on-us-priority-watch-list/article31467719.ece>

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

1. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

What to study?

For Prelims: AIIB- structure, voting and share of countries, NIIF.

For Mains: AIIB- significance, need for infrastructure funding.

Context: India seeks \$6 billion loans from AIIB, ADB to combat COVID-19.

The central government is in talks with Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and ADB to secure these loans to further the testing and infrastructure facilities in the country.

Background:

India has already secured \$1 billion funding from the World Bank to better its health sector for fighting against the coronavirus pandemic according to previous reports. The World Bank has approved a fast-track \$1 billion "India COVID Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project" to help India prevent, detect, and respond to the pandemic and better its public health preparedness. It was the largest ever healthcare sector support from the World Bank.

What is AIIB?

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia and beyond.

It is **headquartered in Beijing**.

- It commenced operations in January 2016.
- By investing in sustainable infrastructure and other productive sectors today, it aims to connect people, services and markets that over time will impact the lives of billions and build a better future.

Various organs of AIIB:

Board of Governors: The Board of Governors consists of one Governor and one Alternate Governor appointed by each member country. Governors and Alternate Governors serve at the pleasure of the appointing member.

Board of Directors: Non-resident Board of Directors is responsible for the direction of the Bank's general operations, exercising all powers delegated to it by the Board of Governors. This includes approving the Bank's strategy, annual plan and budget; establishing policies; taking decisions concerning Bank operations; and supervising management and operation of the Bank and establishing an oversight mechanism.

International Advisory Panel: The Bank has established an International Advisory Panel (IAP) to support the President and Senior Management on the Bank's strategies and policies as well as on general operational issues. The Panel meets in tandem with the Bank's Annual Meeting, or as requested by the President. The President selects and appoints members of the IAP to two-year terms. Panelists receive a small honorarium and do not receive a salary. The Bank pays the costs associated with Panel meetings.

Significance of AIIB:

The United Nations has addressed the launch of AIIB as having potential for "scaling up financing for sustainable development" for the concern of global economic governance. The capital of the bank is \$100 billion, equivalent to 2/3 of the capital of the Asian Development Bank and about half that of the World Bank.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. AIIB vs ADB vs WB.
2. Members of AIIB.
3. Top shareholders.
4. Voting powers.
5. AIIB supported projects in India.

Mains Link:

Write a note on the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Link:

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/world/india-seeks-6-billion-loans-from-aiib-adb-to-combat-covid-19-report/article31254792.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Interpol

What to study?

For Prelims and mains: Composition, objectives and functions of Interpol.

Context: The **International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol)** has warned member countries that cybercriminals were attempting to target major hospitals and other institutions on the front lines of the fight against COVID-19 with **ransomware**.

Interpol has also issued a 'Purple Notice'.

What has the Interpol said?

1. Organisations at the forefront of the global response to the COVID-19 outbreak have also become targets of ransomware attacks, which were "designed to lock them out of their critical systems in an attempt to extort payments".
2. Cybercriminals are using ransomware to hold hospitals and medical services digitally hostage, preventing them from accessing vital files and systems until a ransom is paid.
3. Locking hospitals out of their critical systems will not only delay the swift medical response required during these unprecedented times, it could directly lead to deaths.

How is it being spread?

At this point, the ransomware appears to be spreading primarily via e-mails —often falsely claiming to contain information or advice regarding the coronavirus from a government agency, which encourages the recipient to click on an infected link or attachment.

Need of the hour:

Prevention and mitigation efforts are crucial to stopping the attacks.

What is Interpol?

The International Criminal Police Organisation, or Interpol, is a 194-member intergovernmental organisation.

Headquartered in Lyon, France.

Formed in 1923 as **the International Criminal Police Commission, and started calling itself Interpol in 1956.**

India joined the organisation in 1949, and is one of its oldest members.

Goals and objectives:

Interpol's declared global policing goals include countering terrorism, promoting border integrity worldwide, protection of vulnerable communities, providing a secure cyberspace for people and businesses, curbing illicit markets, supporting environment security, and promoting global integrity.



What is the Interpol General Assembly?

It is **Interpol's supreme governing body**, and comprises representatives from all its member countries.

- It meets annually for a session lasting approximately four days, to vote on activities and policy.
- Each country is represented by one or more delegates at the Assembly, who are typically chiefs of law enforcement agencies.
- The Assembly also elects the members of **the Interpol Executive Committee**, the governing body which "provides guidance and direction in between sessions of the Assembly".

Assembly Resolutions:

The General Assembly's decisions take the form of Resolutions.

Each **member country has one vote**.

Decisions are made either by a **simple or a two-thirds majority, depending on the subject matter**.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Composition and voting in Interpol general assembly.
2. Interpol notices- types and purposes.
3. Genesis of Interpol and its headquarters.
4. Difference between ransomware, virus, Trojan Horse, spyware and malware.

Mains Link:

Write a note on Interpol and different notices issued by it.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=G587AU6Q9.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. UN Women

What to study?

For Prelims: About UN Women- composition, objectives, programmes and significance.

For Mains: Gender violence during lockdown period- reasons, impact and ways to address them.

Context: The UN Women has urged member-states to include prevention of violence against women in their action plans on COVID-19.

It has also called the rise in gender-based violence a "shadow pandemic".

Other suggestions made by UN Women:

1. Member states should consider shelters and helplines essential services.
2. Helplines, psychosocial support and online counselling should be boosted, using technology-based solutions such as SMS, online tools and networks to expand social support, and to reach women with no access to phones or Internet.
3. Police and justice services must mobilise to ensure that incidents of violence against women and girls are given high priority with no impunity for perpetrators.

Why these measures are necessary?

Globally 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months.

The number is likely to increase as security, health and money worries heighten tensions and strains are accentuated by cramped and confined living conditions.

How lockdown is worsening the situation?

According to emerging data, violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has 'intensified'.

1. As per data compiled by the U.N. body, France has seen a 30% increase in domestic violence since the lockdown on March 17.
2. In Argentina, emergency calls for domestic violence cases have increased by 25% since the lockdown on March 20 and Cyprus (30%), Singapore (33%) have also registered an increase in calls.
3. Canada, Germany, Spain, the U.K. and the U.S. have also registered an increase in cases of domestic violence and demand for emergency shelter.

About UN Women: The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women:

UN Women is the UN entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. It was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

In July 2010, **the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women**, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

It merges and builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system, which focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment:

- Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW).
- International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).
- Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI).
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

The main roles of UN Women are:

- To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- To help Member States to implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality, including regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=G587AU6Q5.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID)

What to study?

For Prelims: About GISAID and genome sequencing.

For Mains: Why is it important to understand the genomic sequence of COVID-19?

Context: So far, India has shared nine whole genome sequences of **the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2)** with the **Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID)**. All these have been shared by the Pune-based **National Institute of Virology**.

Background:

Early in March, **India became the fifth country in the world to sequence the genome of the novel Coronavirus, or Covid-19**, and share its data with the international community.

What is genomic sequencing?

Genomic sequencing is a technique that allows us to read and interpret genetic information found within DNA or RNA.

Why is it important to understand the genomic sequence of COVID-19?

The **SARS-CoV2 genome**, as it is formally known, has about 30,000 base pairs, somewhat like a long string with 30,000 places where each one of these occupy one of four chemicals called nucleotides. This long string, with its unique combination of nucleotides, is what uniquely identifies the virus and is called its genomic sequence. A look at virus genome sequences from patient samples that test positive for COVID-19 helps researchers to understand how the virus is evolving as it spreads. So far, there are over 1,000 COVID-19 genomes that have been published worldwide.

Therefore, sequencing is necessary because:

1. It helps track the transmission route of the virus globally.
2. It can determine how quickly the virus is adapting as it spreads.
3. It identifies targets to therapies.
4. It is required to understand the role of co-infection.

What is GISAID?

It is a **public platform started by the WHO** in 2008 for countries to share genome sequences.

- Created as an alternative to the public domain sharing model, GISAID's sharing mechanism took into account the concerns of Member States by providing a publicly accessible database designed by scientist for scientist, to improve the sharing of influenza data.
- In 2010 the **Federal Republic of Germany became the official host of the GISAID platform**.
- In 2013 the European Commission recognized GISAID as a research organization and partner in the **PREDEMICS consortium**, a project on the Preparedness, Prediction and the Prevention of Emerging Zoonotic Viruses with Pandemic Potential using multidisciplinary approaches.

GISAID's database access agreement ensures that **contributors of genetic sequence data do not forfeit their intellectual property rights to the data**.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. What is Genome Sequencing?
2. How it works?
3. RNA vs DNA.
4. Who administers GISAID.

Mains Link:

What is genome sequencing? How it helps prevent the spread of COVID 19?

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=G587AU6QD.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. UN Peacekeeping

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: About UN Peacekeeping- need, significance, challenges and operations in place.

Context: UN chief **Antonio Guterres** has suspended the rotation and deployment of **peacekeepers** until June 30 to mitigate the risk of transmission of the novel coronavirus.

What is peacekeeping? Its significance?

United Nations Peacekeeping is a joint effort between the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support.

Every peacekeeping mission is authorized by the Security Council.

The financial resources of UN Peacekeeping operations are the collective responsibility of UN Member States. According to UN Charter every Member State is legally obligated to pay their respective share for peacekeeping.

Composition:

UN peacekeepers (often referred to as **Blue Berets or Blue Helmets** because of their light blue berets or helmets) can include soldiers, police officers, and civilian personnel.

Peacekeeping forces are contributed by member states on a voluntary basis.

Civilian staff of peace operations are international civil servants, recruited and deployed by the UN Secretariat.

Features:

- United Nations Peacekeeping helps countries torn by conflict create conditions for lasting peace.
- Peacekeeping has unique strengths, including legitimacy, burden sharing, and an ability to deploy and sustain troops and police from around the globe, integrating them with civilian peacekeepers to advance multidimensional mandates.

UN Peacekeeping is guided by three basic principles:

1. Consent of the parties.
2. Impartiality.
3. Non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.

Global partnership:

UN peacekeeping is a unique global partnership.

It brings together the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Secretariat, troop and police contributors and the host governments in a combined effort to maintain international peace and security.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who funds peacekeeping operations?
2. Role of UNSC.
3. Composition of Peacekeepers?
4. Why peacekeepers are called as Blue Helmets?
5. Guiding principles of UN peacekeeping.
6. Ongoing peacekeeping missions.

Mains Link:

Write a note on UN Peacekeeping and its significance.

Sources: the Hindu.

6. How is WHO funded?

What to study?

For Prelims: WHO- objectives, functions, funding and governance.

For Mains: Issues with funding and need for reforms.

Context: US President Donald Trump is planning to put a hold on America's funding to the **World Health Organization**, accusing it of becoming **China-centric** during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

- **How much will Trump's threat of stopping funds impact WHO?**
The US is the largest contributor to the WHO. The US share is part of the assessed contributions, which is more like a membership fee, calculated on the basis of a country's wealth and population, payable on January 1 each year.
- The share of assessed contributions in WHO's annual budget has declined over the years, to the extent that they now constitute just 24%. The rest is through voluntary contributions not just from member nations but also from private organisations.
- Besides, as of January 31, the US still hasn't paid the dues for 2019 or for 2020, amounting to almost \$200 million. Therefore, the impact would not be much on WHO.

Implications:

If Trump does decide to block the US' contribution, the WHO can suspend the country's voting rights and deny access to its services, as per Article 7 of its Constitution.

About WHO:

WHO came into existence on 7 April, 1948 – a date which is now celebrated every year as **World Health Day**. The organisation has more than 7,000 people working in 150 country offices, six regional offices and at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

How WHO is governed?

1. The World Health Assembly (delegations from all members countries) determines the policies of the organisation.
2. The executive board is composed of members technically qualified in health, and gives effect to the decisions and policies of the health assembly.
3. Its core function is to direct and coordinate international health work through collaboration.

How is the WHO funded?

There are four kinds of contributions that make up funding for the WHO.

These are:

1. **Assessed contributions** are the dues countries pay in order to be a member of the Organization. The amount each Member State must pay is calculated relative to the country's wealth and population.
2. **Voluntary contributions** come from Member States (in addition to their assessed contribution) or from other partners. They can range from flexible to highly earmarked.
3. **Core voluntary contributions** allow less well-funded activities to benefit from a better flow of resources and ease implementation bottlenecks that arise when immediate financing is lacking.
4. **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) Contributions** were started in 2011 to improve and strengthen the sharing of influenza viruses with human pandemic potential, and to increase the access of developing countries to vaccines and other pandemic related supplies.

WHO's current funding pattern:

As of fourth quarter of 2019, total contributions were around \$5.62 billion, with assessed contributions accounting for \$956 million, specified voluntary contributions \$4.38 billion, core voluntary contributions \$160 million, and PIP contributions \$178 million.

Largest contributions:

1. The **United States is currently the WHO's biggest contributor**, making up 14.67 per cent of total funding by providing \$553.1 million.
2. The US is followed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation forming 9.76 per cent or \$367.7 million.
3. The third biggest contributor is **the GAVI Vaccine Alliance** at 8.39 per cent, with the UK (7.79 per cent) and Germany (5.68 per cent) coming fourth and fifth respectively.
4. **The four next biggest donors are international bodies:** United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (5.09 per cent), World Bank (3.42 per cent), Rotary International (3.3 per cent), and the European Commission (3.3 per cent). **India makes up 0.48 per cent of total contributions**, and China 0.21 per cent.

Allocation of funds:

- Out of the total funds, \$1.2 billion is allotted for the Africa region, \$1.02 billion for Eastern Mediterranean region, \$963.9 million for the WHO headquarters, followed by South East Asia (\$198.7 million), Europe (\$200.4 million), Western Pacific (\$152.1 million), and Americas (39.2 million) regions respectively. India is part of the South East Asia region.
- The biggest programme area where the money is allocated is polio eradication (26.51 per cent), followed by increasing access to essential health and nutrition services (12.04 per cent), and preventable diseases vaccines (8.89 per cent).

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. WHO governance.
2. Types of contributions in WHO.
3. Largest contributors.
4. Significance of World Health Day.

Mains Link:

Discuss the role of WHO in promoting public health and environmental health across the globe.

Sources: Indian Express.

7. ASEAN

What to study?

For Prelims: ASEAN- objectives, members and functions.

For Mains: Significance of the group, challenges present and ways to make it more effective.

Context: In an **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit** held online recently, leaders of the virus-hit region warned of the crippling economic cost of COVID-19, calling for trade routes to reopen to protect jobs and food supplies, as well as the stockpiling of medical equipment.

What is ASEAN?

The **Association of Southeast Asian Nations** is a regional organization which was established to promote political and social stability amid rising tensions among the **Asia-Pacific's post-colonial states**.

The motto of ASEAN is “**One Vision, One Identity, One Community**”.

ASEAN Secretariat – Indonesia, Jakarta.

Genesis:

Established in 1967 with the signing of the **ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration)** by its founding fathers.

Founding Fathers of ASEAN are: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Institution Mechanism:

Chairmanship of ASEAN rotates annually, based on the alphabetical order of the English names of Member States.

ASEAN Summit: The supreme policy making body of ASEAN. As the highest level of authority in ASEAN, the Summit sets the direction for ASEAN policies and objectives. Under the Charter, the Summit meets twice a year.

ASEAN Ministerial Councils: The Charter established four important new Ministerial bodies to support the Summit.

1. ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC).

2. ASEAN Political-Security Community Council.
3. ASEAN Economic Community Council.
4. ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Council.

Significance of the grouping:

3rd largest market in the world - larger than EU and North American markets.

6th largest economy in the world, 3rd in Asia.

Free-trade agreements (FTAs) with China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand.

Fourth most popular investment destination globally.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Geographical location of asean countries.
2. Total population of asean countries.
3. Chairmanship of ASEAN.
4. When and where Asean summits are held?
5. What are Free-trade agreements (FTAs)?

Mains Link:

Examine the significance of ASEAN for India's economic, geo-strategic and security imperatives?

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GEE7BGMHK.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.



8. International Energy Agency (IEA)

What to study?

For Prelims: IEA- objectives, functions, reports and members.

For Mains: Significance and its role in ensuring energy security.

Context: IEA has made some observations about the impact of global lockdown on oil demands across the world.

Key observations:

- The price of crude has already fallen about 60% since the start of the year due to a pricing war between Saudi Arabia and Russia and then the economic devastation wrought by the virus outbreak.
- Now, global demand for oil will fall this year by the most ever due to the economic lockdowns enforced around the world to contain the coronavirus pandemic.
- An estimated drop in demand of 9.3 million barrels a day this year is equivalent to a decade's worth of growth.

Impact and implications of these changes:

- While the cheaper energy can be helpful for consumers and energy-hungry businesses, it is below the cost of production.
- That is eating away at the state finances of oil-producing countries, many of whom are relatively poor economies, and pushing companies to bankruptcy.
- With broad limits on travel and business, many consumers are unable to take advantage of the low prices anyway.
- The recent deal by OPEC and other countries to reduce global output by some 9.7 million barrels a day will help stabilize the situation somewhat.
- On top of those cuts, countries like China, India, South Korea and the United States will look to buy more oil to store away in strategic reserves.

About IEA:

Established in **1974 as per framework of the OECD**, IEA is **an autonomous intergovernmental organisation**.

MISSION – To ensure reliable, affordable and clean energy for its member countries and beyond.

Its mission is guided by **four main areas of focus**: energy security, economic development, environmental awareness and engagement worldwide

Headquarters (Secretariat): Paris, France.

Roles and functions:

Established in the wake of the **1973-1974 oil crisis**, to help its members respond to major oil supply disruptions, a role it continues to fulfil today.

IEA's mandate has expanded over time to **include tracking and analyzing global key energy trends, promoting sound energy policy, and fostering multinational energy technology cooperation**.

Composition and eligibility:

It has **30 members at present**. IEA family also includes **eight association countries**.

A candidate country must be a **member country of the OECD**. But all OECD members are not IEA members.

To become member a candidate country must demonstrate that it has:

1. Crude oil and/or product reserves equivalent to 90 days of the previous year's net imports, to which the government has immediate access (even if it does not own them directly) and could be used to address disruptions to global oil supply.
2. A demand restraint programme to reduce national oil consumption by up to 10%.
3. Legislation and organisation to operate the Co-ordinated Emergency Response Measures (CERM) on a national basis.
4. Legislation and measures to ensure that all oil companies under its jurisdiction report information upon request.
5. Measures in place to ensure the capability of contributing its share of an IEA collective action.

Reports:

1. Global Energy & CO2 Status Report.
2. World Energy Outlook.
3. World Energy Statistics.
4. World Energy Balances.
5. Energy Technology Perspectives.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Various reports released by IEA.
2. Composition of OECD and OPEC? Who can become members?
3. Top crude oil producers and importers globally?
4. Who are associate members of IEA?
5. What kind of IEA member is India?

Mains Link:

Write a note on objectives and functions of the International Energy Agency.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/business/Industry/iea-forecasts-huge-drop-in-oil-demand-in-2020/article31351108.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

9. World Heritage Day

What to study?

For Prelims: UNESCO WHS- important sites.

For Mains: Significance and the need for conservation of WHS.

Context: Every year, **18th April is celebrated Worldwide as World Heritage Day** to create awareness about Heritage among communities.

The theme of World Heritage Day 2020 is "Shared Culture", 'Shared heritage' and 'Shared responsibility".

Key facts:

- There are a **total of 38 heritage sites in India**.
- India ranks **sixth in the largest number of heritage sites in the world**.

Background:

In 1982, the **International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)** announced, 18 April as **the "World Heritage Day"**, approved by the General Assembly of UNESCO in 1983, with the aim of enhancing awareness of the importance of the cultural heritage of humankind, and redouble efforts to protect and conserve the human heritage.

What is a World Heritage site?

A World Heritage site is classified as a **natural or man-made area or a structure that is of international importance, and a space which requires special protection**.

These sites are **officially recognised by the UN and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, also known as UNESCO**. UNESCO believes that the sites classified as World Heritage are important for humanity, and they hold cultural and physical significance.

Key facts:

1. The list is maintained by **the international World Heritage Programme** administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 UNESCO member states which are elected by the General Assembly.
2. Each World Heritage Site remains **part of the legal territory** of the state wherein the site is located and UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.
3. **To be selected**, a World Heritage Site must be an already classified landmark, unique in some respect as a geographically and historically identifiable place having special cultural or physical significance.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who declares a site as world heritage site?
2. What is endangered list?
3. What is tentative list?
4. WHS in India and their locations?

Sources: pib.

10. Islamophobia and IOC

What to study?

For Prelims: All about IOC.

For Mains: Islamophobia- causes, concerns and need for immediate measures.

Context: **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** has criticised India for what it called "**growing Islamophobia**".

IOC said, Muslim minorities are being "negatively profiled," facing "discrimination and violence" amidst the COVID-19 crisis in India.

What has the IOC said?

It has urged the Indian Govt to take urgent steps to stop the growing tide of Islamophobia in India and protect the rights of its persecuted Muslim minority as per its obligations under international Human Rights law.

What's the issue?

A religious gathering of muslims (Tablighi Jamaat) was held in Delhi in March. The event was linked to many of the Covid-19 positive cases in India. After this most sections of the media, people on social media blamed the Tablighi jamaat and muslims for deliberately spreading the Covid-19 in India.

About the OIC:

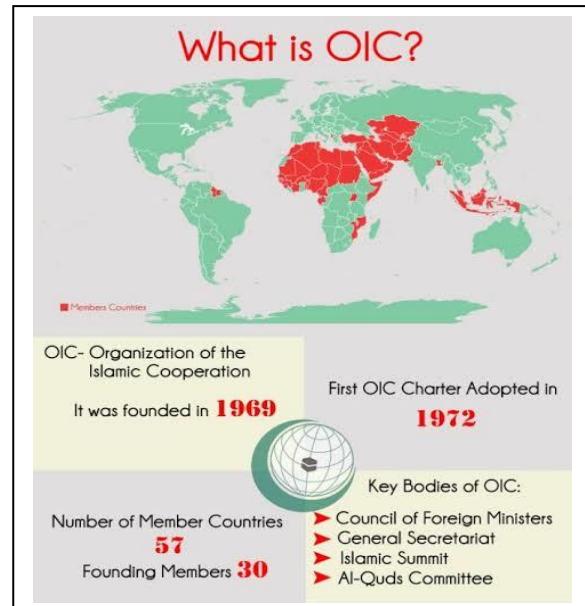
Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is **an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states.**

It is **the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.**

The organisation states that it is **“the collective voice of the Muslim world” and works to “safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony”.**

The OIC has **permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.**

Permanent Secretariat is in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.



Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Members of IOC and their geographical locations?
2. Is India a member of IOC?
3. IOC objectives?
4. Other Islamic groups of international importance?

Mains Link:

Are Muslim minorities being “negatively profiled” amidst the COVID-19 crisis in India. Discuss.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GR57BU4UE.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

11. COVID-19 Rural Poor Stimulus Facility

What to study?

For Prelims: Overview of the new fund, target groups and about IFAD.

For Mains: Significance and the need for supportive measures for the poor worldwide.

Context: Given the magnitude of the challenge presented by the COVID-19 crisis, IFAD has launched a multi-donor **COVID-19 Rural Poor Stimulus Facility (RPSF)**.

Key facts:

1. The RPSF is a **short-term strategy that feeds into IFAD's longer-term development objectives.**
2. IFAD will initiate the Facility with US\$40 million of seed funding from grant resources and expects to mobilize at least US\$200 million from Member States and other donors to scale up support.
3. The Facility will leverage **the UN Secretary-General's Response and Recovery Fund** and the work of other multilateral partners to achieve food security for the millions of poor rural people in the most remote and vulnerable communities.

Objectives:

- It aims to improve the food security and resilience of poor rural people by supporting production, market access and employment.
- The ultimate goal of the RPSF is to accelerate the recovery of poor and vulnerable rural people from the COVID-19 crisis.

Significance of this facility:

This initiative aligns with the UN socio-economic response framework and complements IFAD's broader COVID-19 response efforts.

It seeks to improve the resilience of rural livelihoods in the context of the crisis by ensuring timely access to inputs, information, markets and liquidity.

The planned interventions fall into four main categories:

1. **Providing inputs and basic assets for production** of crops, livestock and fisheries.
2. **Facilitating access to markets** to support small-scale farmers in selling their products in conditions where market functions are restricted.
3. **Targeting funds for rural financial services** to ensure sufficient liquidity and to ease repayment requirements so as to maintain services, markets and jobs.
4. **Promoting the use of digital services** to deliver key information on production, weather, finance and markets.

Eligibility:

- All IFAD-supported country programmes that are at risk of not achieving their development outcomes due to COVID-19 are eligible to receive funding from the RPSF.
- Preference will be given to countries with low institutional and financial capacity to respond to the crisis.
- Ceiling amounts for countries and projects will be determined by the total amount of financing available.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. IFAD- functions and funding.
2. What is UN Secretary-General's Response and Recovery Fund?
3. Eligibility for RPSF funding.

Mains Link:

Discuss the objectives and significance of COVID-19 Rural Poor Stimulus Facility.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/actor-idris-elba-launches-un-coronavirus-fund-for-poor-farmers/article31392406.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

12. New Development Bank

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: NDB- roles, composition, objectives and functions.

Context: Finance Minister of India recently attended the **5th Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the New Development Bank through video-conference.**

About the New Development Bank:

It is a **multilateral development bank operated by the BRICS states** (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

The New Development Bank was agreed to by BRICS leaders at the **5th BRICS summit held in Durban, South Africa in 2013**.

It was **established in 2014**, at the 6th BRICS Summit at Fortaleza, Brazil.

The bank is set up to **foster greater financial and development cooperation among the five emerging markets**.

In the **Fortaleza Declaration**, the leaders stressed that the NDB will strengthen cooperation among BRICS and will supplement the efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global development.

The bank will be **headquartered in Shanghai, China**.

Unlike the World Bank, which assigns votes based on capital share, in the New Development Bank **each participant country will be assigned one vote, and none of the countries will have veto power.**

Roles and functions:

The New Development Bank will mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, to supplement existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. NDB- members and voting powers.
2. Where it can invest?
3. Which are the NDB funded projects in India?
4. Fortaleza declaration is related to?
5. When was NDB established?

Mains Link:

Discuss the objectives and significance of NDB.

Sources: pib

13. In News- World Food Programme

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Key facts on WFP and its programmes.

About WFP:

The World Food Programme (WFP) is **the food assistance branch of the United Nations and the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security.**

The WFP strives to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, with the ultimate goal in mind of **eliminating the need for food aid itself.**

It is a **member of the United Nations Development Group and part of its Executive Committee.**

Born in **1961**, WFP pursues a **vision of the world in which every man, woman and child has access at all times to the food needed for an active and healthy life.**

The WFP is governed by an Executive Board which consists of representatives from member states.

The WFP operations are **funded by voluntary donations from world governments, corporations and private donors.**

WFP food aid is also directed to fight micronutrient deficiencies, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat disease, including HIV and AIDS.

The objectives of the World Food Programme are:

1. Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies.
2. Support food security and nutrition and (re)build livelihoods in fragile settings and following emergencies.
3. Reduce risk and enable people, communities and countries to meet their own food and nutrition needs.
4. Reduce under-nutrition and break the inter-generational cycle of hunger.
5. Zero Hunger in 2030.

“World Hunger Map”:

Alibaba Cloud, the cloud computing arm of Alibaba is working with **WFP to develop digital “World Hunger Map”**. The map will help to monitor global hunger and operations to end scourge by 2030 which is one of UN's key Sustainable Development goals. It also aims to boost efficiency of interventions and shorten emergency response times.

Sources: the Hindu.

14. WB Commodity Markets Outlook

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Key findings, concerns and measures to address these concerns.

Context: World Bank's April 2020 Commodity Markets Outlook has been released.

Commodity Markets Outlook provides market analysis for major commodity groups -- energy, metals, agriculture, precious metals, and fertilizers.

The report forecasts prices for 46 key commodities, including oil. It is published in April and October.

Key observations:

1. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted both demand for and supply of commodities: direct effects from shutdowns and disruptions to supply chains, indirect effects as economic growth stalls.
2. Effects have already been dramatic, particularly for commodities related to transportation.
3. Oil prices have plunged and demand is expected to fall by an unprecedented amount in 2020.
4. While most food markets are well supplied, concerns about food security have risen as countries announce trade restrictions and engage in excess buying.
5. The halt in economic activity has taken a toll on industrial commodities such as copper and zinc, and metal prices overall are expected to fall this year.
6. Commodity-dependent emerging market and developing economies will be among the most vulnerable to the economic impacts of the pandemic.

What next?

1. Importers and exporters of commodities are likely to see some long-term shifts in their markets due to the pandemic.
2. These include increasing transport costs due to enhanced border checks, unwinding supply chains (companies might prefer to source from closer by for instance), substituting for imports with domestic goods as transport costs rise and changing consumer behaviour.
3. The break in emissions caused by the restrictions may also increase public pressure for greener transport and lowered fossil fuel use.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Important reports released by WB.
2. WB- composition and funding.
3. Voting and membership in WB.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/business/markets/most-commodity-prices-will-drop-substantially-in-2020-world-bank/article31418191.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

15. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

What to study?

For Prelims: All about UNCTAD, suggestions made.

For Mains: Concerns expressed and significance of the suggestions made.

Context: The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has released its latest **Trade and Development Report**.

Present global scenario:

- This is necessary because of the hardship caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Developing countries may see their public external debt increase to \$2.4-3.6 trillion in 2020 and 2021.

- Even before the coronavirus pandemic hit developing economies, many of them are trapped in a debt-spiral — struggling with unsustainable debt burdens for many years, as well as with rising health and economic needs.
- The financial turmoil from the crisis has triggered record portfolio capital outflows from emerging economies and sharp currency devaluations in developing countries, making servicing their debts more onerous.

Need of the hour- suggestions made by UNCTAD:

The report outlined **three key steps**:

1. Automatic temporary standstills:

Provides macroeconomic “breathing space” for all crisis-stricken developing countries requesting forbearance to free up resources, normally dedicated to servicing external sovereign debt.”

If the standstills are long and comprehensive enough **they would facilitate an effective response to the Covid-19 shock through increased health and social expenditure** in the immediate future and allow for post-crisis economic recovery along sustainable growth, fiscal and trade balance trajectories.

2. Debt relief and restructure programmes:

Such programs would ensure the “breathing space” gained under the first step is used to reassess longer-term developing country debt sustainability, on a case-by-case basis.”

A trillion-dollar write-off would be closer to the figure needed to prevent economic disaster across the developing world.

3. International developing country debt authority:

To oversee their implementation and lay the institutional and regulatory foundations for a more permanent international framework to guide sovereign debt restructuring in future.

About United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD):

UNCTAD is a permanent intergovernmental body established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1964.

It is part of the UN Secretariat.

It reports to the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, but has its own membership, leadership, and budget.

It is also a part of the United Nations Development Group.

Objectives and roles:

It supports developing countries to access the benefits of a globalized economy more fairly and effectively.

Along with other UN departments and agencies, it also measures the progress made in the Sustainable Development Goals, as set out in Agenda 2030.

Reports published by UNCTAD are:

1. Trade and Development Report
2. World Investment Report
3. Technology and Innovation Report
4. Digital Economy Report

Link:

<https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=2343>.

Sources: UNCTAD.

16. The report on Trends in World Military Expenditure

What to study?

For Prelims: Key findings of the report.

For Mains: Need for military spending, concerns associated.

Context: The report on **Trends in World Military Expenditure** was recently released by **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri)**.

Key findings:

India specific:

1. **Top three biggest military spenders in the world last year:** The United States, China and India.
2. **This is the first time that India and China have featured among the top three military spenders.**
3. New Delhi's defence spending grew 6.8% to reach \$71.1 billion in 2019.
4. India's military expenditure grew 259% over the 30-year period (1990-2019) and by 37% over the decade (2010-19).
5. However, its (India's) military burden fell from 2.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010 to 2.4% in 2019.
6. India's military spending has grown significantly over the past decade due to a raft of reasons including a mounting salary bill for about 1.4 million serving personnel, pensions for more than two million veterans and deals worth billions of dollars to induct new combat jets, air defence missile systems, helicopters, warships and artillery guns to enhance capabilities.

Global scenario:

1. According to the report, global military expenditure stood at around \$1,917 billion in 2019 - the highest in over three decades.
2. This represents an increase of 3.6% over the global defence spending in 2018 and the largest annual growth in military expenditure since 2010.
3. The five top spenders in 2019 accounted for 62% of the global expenditure.
4. The US topped the list of military spenders with \$732 billion in 2019 accounting for 38% of the total global defence expenditure. It spent almost as much on its military last year as the next 10 highest spenders combined, the report said.
5. China's military expenditure has increased continuously since 1994 (for 25 consecutive years). The growth in its military spending has closely matched the country's economic growth.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-china-among-top-three-military-spenders-in-2019-sipri-report/article31445560.ece>

Sources: the Hindu.

17. Petersberg Climate Dialogue

What to study?

For Prelims: The event, aim, host and features.

For Mains: Objectives, significance and achievements of the dialogue.

Context: The eleventh and first ever virtual Petersberg Climate Dialogue was held on April 28th 2020.

India, along with 30 countries, deliberated over ways and means to tackle the challenge of reinvigorating economies and societies after COVID-19, while enhancing collective resilience and catalysing climate action while also supporting in particular those most vulnerable.

About the Petersberg Climate Dialogue:

This has been **hosted by Germany** since 2010.

The Climate Dialogue was originally an **initiative of German Chancellor Angela Merkel**. It is **hosted by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety**.

Aim: To provide a forum for informal high-level political discussions, focusing both on international climate negotiations and the advancement of climate action.

The Dialogue was **co-chaired by Germany and the United Kingdom**, the incoming Presidency of the **26th Conference of Parties (COP 26) to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is UNFCCC?
2. What is Copenhagen summit?
3. Who organises Petersberg Climate Dialogue?
4. What is COP?

Sources: pib.

18. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

What to study?

For Prelims: Compilation, objectives, functions and geographical locations of member countries.

For Mains: Relevance and significance of the group for India.

Context: The **Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)** region is expected to post a 2.7 per cent economic decline in 2020 due to the impact of Covid-19.

This will be the **most significant fall since the near-zero growth rate logged in 2009 during the global financial crisis.**

The region's **unemployment rate is projected to rise to 5.4 per cent in 2020** from 3.8 per cent in 2019, or an additional 23.5 million workers being unemployed in 2020.

Economic rebound:

An economic rebound is a forecast for 2021, with the anticipated growth of 6.3 per cent, higher than the projected global economic growth of 5.8 per cent.

This rebound, however, depends on the effectiveness of containment mechanisms to avoid a second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as measures to stimulate the economy.

APEC:

The **Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)** is a regional economic forum **established in 1989** to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific.

Aim: to create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.

Functions:

- APEC works to help all residents of the Asia-Pacific participate in the growing economy. APEC projects provide digital skills training for rural communities and help indigenous women export their products abroad.
- Recognizing the impacts of climate change, APEC members also implement initiatives to increase energy efficiency and promote sustainable management of forest and marine resources.
- The forum adapts to allow members to deal with important new challenges to the region's economic well-being. This includes ensuring disaster resilience, planning for pandemics, and addressing terrorism.

Members:

APEC's 21 member economies are Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea;



Peru; The Philippines; The Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States of America; Viet Nam.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Geographical locations of APEC members.
2. Regional groups to which India is not a member.

Sources: Business Standard.

19. India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Permanent mission and representatives- roles, functions and significance.

Context: India has appointed diplomat T S Tirumurti, currently serving as Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, as its **Permanent Representative to the United Nations**.

What are Permanent Missions to the United Nations?

According to **Article 1 (7) of the Vienna Convention** on the Representation of States in their Relations with International Organizations of a Universal Character, a “Permanent Mission” is a: “mission of permanent character, representing the State, sent by a State member of an international organization to the Organization”.

The Permanent Mission is the **diplomatic mission that every member state deputes to the United Nations**. It is headed by a **Permanent Representative**, who is also referred to as the “UN ambassador”.

Roles and functions:

- The presence of such permanent missions serves to assist in the realization of the purposes and principles of the United Nations.
- They seek to keep the necessary liaison between the Member States and the Secretariat in periods between sessions of the different organs of the United Nations.
- The Representatives are assigned to the UN headquarters in New York City, and can also be appointed to other UN offices in Geneva, Vienna, and Nairobi.

The Indian Permanent Mission at the UN:

There are currently eight Indians in senior leadership positions at the United Nations at the levels of Under Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General.

The first Indian delegates at the United Nations included statesman Arcot Ramasamy Mudaliar, and freedom fighters Hansa Mehta, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, and Lakshmi Menon. **Mehta and Pandit were among the 15 women members of the Indian Constituent Assembly**.

India and the UN:

- India was among the select members of the United Nations that signed the United Nations Declaration at Washington on January 1, 1942.
- India also participated in the historic UN Conference of International Organization at San Francisco from April 25 to June 26, 1945.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/indias-permanent-mission-to-the-united-nations-explained-6386259/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

GENERAL STUDIES – 3

Topics: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

1. Ways And Means Advances

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: WMA- meaning, features and significance.

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced a 60% increase in the Ways and Means Advances (WMA) limit of state governments over and above the level as on March 31, with a view to enabling them “to undertake COVID-19 containment and mitigation efforts” and “to better plan their market borrowings”.

Significance of this move:

The increased limit comes at a time when government expenditure is expected to rise as it battles the fallout of a spreading Coronavirus. The availability of these funds will give government some room to undertake short term expenditure over and above its long term market borrowings.

What are Ways and Means Advances?

- They are **temporary loan facilities** provided by RBI to the government to enable it to meet temporary mismatches between revenue and expenditure.
- The government makes **an interest payment to the central bank when it borrows money**.
- The **rate of interest is the same as the repo rate**, while the tenure is three months.
- The **limits for WMA are mutually decided by the RBI and the Government of India**.

They **aren't a source of finance per se**. Section 17(5) of the RBI Act, 1934 authorises the central bank to lend to the Centre and state governments subject to their being repayable “not later than three months from the date of the making of the advance”.

Background:

The **WMA scheme for the Central Government** was introduced on April 1, 1997, after putting an end to the four-decade old system of adhoc (temporary) Treasury Bills to finance the Central Government deficit.

What if the government needs extra money for extra time?

When the WMA limit is crossed the government takes recourse to **overdrafts**, which are not allowed beyond 10 consecutive working days.

The **interest rate on overdrafts would be 2 percent more than the repo rate**.

Types of WMA:

There are two types of Ways and Means Advances — **normal and special**.

Special WMA or Special Drawing Facility is provided against the collateral of the government securities held by the state. After the state has exhausted the limit of SDF, it gets normal WMA. **The interest rate for SDF is one percentage point less than the repo rate**.

The **number of loans under normal WMA is based on a three-year average of actual revenue and capital expenditure of the state**.

What are the existing WMA limits and overdraft conditions?

For the Centre, the WMA limit during the first half of 2020-21 (April-September) has been fixed at Rs 120,000 crore. This is 60% higher than the Rs 75,000 crore limit for the same period of 2019-20. The limit for the second half of the last fiscal (October-March) was Rs 35,000 crore.

For the states, the aggregate WMA limit was Rs 32,225 crore till March 31, 2020. On April 1, the RBI announced a 30% hike in this limit, which has now been enhanced to 60%, taking it to Rs 51,560 crore. The higher limit will be valid till September 30.

The central bank, on April 7, also extended the period for which a state can be in overdraft from 14 to 21 consecutive working days, and from 36 to 50 working days during a quarter.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Interest rate and time period for WMA?
2. Can states borrow under WMA?
3. What is overdraft?
4. What are the statutory provisions in this regard?

Mains Link:

What do you understand by ways and means advances? How increase in WMA limits help the governments deal with the present situation? Discuss.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/reserve-bank-of-india-rbi-ways-and-means-advances-wma-repo-rate-coronavirus-covid-19-6367396/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

2. What is marginal cost of funds-based lending rate or MCLR?

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: MCLR- meaning, implications, how it is set, need for and significance.

Context: State Bank of India, the country's largest lender, has reduced **the marginal cost of fund-based lending rate (MCLR)** by 35 basis points (bps) across all loan tenures. The new rate will come into effect from April 10. The move comes after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reduced the repo rate by 75 bps in the last week of March.

What is MCLR? How is it determined?

It is **the minimum interest rate that a bank can lend at**.

It is a tenor-linked internal benchmark, which means the rate is determined internally by the bank depending on the period left for the repayment of a loan.

MCLR is closely linked to the actual deposit rates and is **calculated based on four components**: the marginal cost of funds, negative carry on account of cash reserve ratio, operating costs and tenor premium.

Genesis of MCLR:

The Reserve Bank of India introduced the MCLR methodology for fixing interest rates from 1 April 2016. It replaced **the base rate structure**, which had been in place since July 2010.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=G587AU6NS.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

3. Long-term repo operations (LTROs)

What to study?

For Prelims: Features of LTRO.

For Mains: Its significance and applicability.

Context: The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has said it has received Rs 1.13 lakh crore worth of bids in the targeted **long term repo operation (LTRO)** conducted for an amount of Rs 25,000 crore with a three-year tenor.

The RBI received 18 bids in the auction. The total bids that were received amounted to Rs 1.13 lakh crore, implying a bid to cover ratio -- the amount of bids received relative to the notified amount -- of 4.5.

What is LTRO?

The LTRO is a tool under which the central bank provides **one-year to three-year money to banks at the prevailing repo rate**, accepting government securities with matching or higher tenure as the collateral.

How is it different from LAF and MSF?

While the RBI's current windows of liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) and marginal standing facility (MSF) offer banks money for their immediate needs ranging from 1-28 days, the LTRO supplies them with liquidity for their 1- to 3-year needs.

LTRO operations are **intended to prevent short-term interest rates in the market from drifting a long way away from the policy rate, which is the repo rate.**

Why is it important?

- As banks get long-term funds at lower rates, their cost of funds falls.
- In turn, they reduce interest rates for borrowers.
- LTRO helped RBI ensure that banks reduce their marginal cost of funds-based lending rate, without reducing policy rates.
- LTRO also showed the market that RBI will not only rely on revising repo rates and conducting open market operations for its monetary policy, but also use new tools to achieve its intended objectives.

Link:

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/rbi-gets-rs-1-13-lakh-crore-worth-bids-in-targeted-ltro/articleshow/75072831.cms>.

Sources: TOI.

4. Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme

What to study?

For Prelims: Features of the SGB scheme.

For Mains: The scheme and its significance for India.

Context: Government of India, in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India, has decided to issue Sovereign Gold Bonds.

About the Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme:

- The sovereign gold bond was **introduced by the Government in 2015**.
- Government **introduced these bonds to help reduce India's over dependence on gold imports**.
- The move was also aimed at changing the habits of Indians from saving in physical form of gold to a paper form with Sovereign backing.

Key facts:

Eligibility: The bonds will be restricted for sale to resident Indian entities, including individuals, HUFs, trusts, universities and charitable institutions.

Denomination and tenor: The bonds will be denominated in multiples of gram(s) of gold with a basic unit of 1 gram. The tenor will be for a period of 8 years with exit option from the 5th year to be exercised on the interest payment dates.

Minimum and Maximum limit: The minimum permissible investment limit will be 1 gram of gold, while the maximum limit will be 4 kg for individual, 4 kg for HUF and 20 kg for trusts and similar entities per fiscal (April-March) notified by the government from time to time.

Joint Holder: In case of joint holding, the investment limit of 4 kg will be applied to the first applicant only.

Collateral: Bonds can be used as collateral for loans. The loan-to-value (LTV) ratio is to be set equal to ordinary gold loan mandated by the Reserve Bank from time to time.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

- Eligibility for scheme?
- Can they be used as collateral?

3. What is the minimum and maximum permissible limit?
4. Who can issue these bonds?

Mains Link:

Discuss the key features and significance of Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme.

Sources: pib.

5. What is helicopter money?

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: What is Helicopter money, features, need for and significance? How is it different from quantitative easing?

Context: Amid rising concerns over economic crisis that has been triggered by the COVID-19 lockdown;

Helicopter Money is one concept that is being considered by authorities' world over.

In fact, Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao has suggested RBI to adopt the concept of Helicopter Money to help state governments tide over the current crisis and kickstart economic activity in India.

What is helicopter money?

This is an unconventional monetary policy tool aimed at bringing a flagging economy back on track.

It involves **printing large sums of money and distributing it to the public.**

American economist **Milton Friedman** coined this term.

Why it is called so?

It basically denotes a helicopter dropping money from the sky. Friedman used the term to signify "unexpectedly dumping money onto a struggling economy with the intention to shock it out of a deep slump." Under such a policy, a central bank "directly increase the money supply and, via the government, distribute the new cash to the population with the aim of boosting demand and inflation."

Why is helicopter money in news now?

With the coronavirus-hit economy falling deeper and deeper into a chasm with each passing day, Telangana chief minister KC Rao has said helicopter money can help states comes out of this morass.

He asked for the release of 5% funds from GDP by way of **quantitative easing (QE)**.

Is helicopter money the same as quantitative easing?

Quantitative easing also involves the use of printed money by central banks to buy government bonds. But not everyone views the money used in QE as helicopter money. It sure means printing money to monetise government deficits, but **the govt has to pay back for the assets that the central bank buys**. It's not the same as bond-buying by central banks "in which bank-owned assets are swapped for new central bank reserves."

How will Helicopter Money help Indian Economy?

- Simply put, Helicopter Money means extension of non-repayable money transfer from the central bank to the state and central governments, to infuse liquidity in the system.
- The policy aims at putting more money into the pockets of people to nudge them to spend more money and in turn pick-up economic activity in the country.
- The direct impact of Helicopter Money is rise in disposable incomes of the people, increase in money supply with an intention to boost demand and inflation in the economy.

Link:

<https://www.livemint.com/news/india/rbi-should-implement-helicopter-money-to-counter-economic-crisis-telangana-cm-11586633899851.html>.

Sources: Livemint.

6. How the RBI is handling 'The Great Lockdown'?

What to study?

For Prelims: Key measures announced and related key terms.

For Mains: Need for and significance of these measures, implications?

Context: The **International Monetary Fund** has christened the ongoing economic crisis due to Covid-19 as “**The Great Lockdown**” and reckons it to be the worst recession that the world would have faced since **the Great Depression that happened in the first half of the 20th Century**.

The **total estimated loss to global economic growth** is pegged at \$9 trillion — more than three times India’s GDP.

How is India tackling the situation? What will be its impact?

Thanks to various measures by RBI and the government, while the rest of the world is certain to contract, India is hoping to be one of the few countries that expand their overall GDP, regardless of how small that increase may be.

RBI has so far **made two rounds of policy announcements** to counter the debilitating effects of the spread of Covid-19 on the Indian economy.

In the first round, the RBI mainly:

- Cut **the repo rate and the reverse repo rate**.
- Started **Targeted Long Term Repo Operations (TLTROs)**.

In essence, through these measures in the first round, the RBI:

- Tried to provide **regulatory forbearance** (that is, greater leniency) in recognising non-performing assets.
- Tried to **boost the liquidity in the financial system** so that businesses do not starve of funds.

In the second round, the RBI has:

1. **Cut the reverse repo rate further by 25 basis points** (100 basis points make up one full percentage point). **The reverse repo rate now stands at 3.75 per cent while the repo rate is 4.40 per cent**.
2. Announced another **TLTRO of Rs 50,000 crore** but this time it has mandated that **50 per cent of this amount borrowed by the banks must go to small and mid-sized Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) and Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs)**.
3. All India financial institutions (AIFIs) such as the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) and the National Housing Bank (NHB), which borrow from the RBI and the market to extend credit to NBFCs and MFIs, will be provided “**special refinance facilities for a total amount of Rs 50,000 crore**” by the RBI.
4. More funding to state governments — under the **Ways and Means Advances (WMA) facility** — as they try to spend to mitigate the economic stress.
5. In respect of all accounts for which lending institutions decide to grant moratorium or deferment, and which were standard as on March 1, 2020, **the 90-day NPA norm shall exclude the moratorium period, i.e., there would an asset classification standstill for all such accounts from March 1, 2020 to May 31, 2020**
6. To ensure that loans given to real estate projects, that are getting delayed due to the crisis, do not turn into NPAs, **the RBI provided an extension of another year before they are recognised as NPAs**.
7. Allowed Scheduled Commercial Banks to reduce their **Liquidity Coverage Ratio** from 100 per cent to 80 per cent with immediate effect. The LCR essentially mandates the amount of cash that a bank is required to keep with itself.

Implications of these measures:

1. **Cutting reverse repo more than the repo**, and thereby increase the gap between the two rates: On the one hand, the RBI is incentivising banks to borrow from it at low rates and lend it forward to businesses, yet, on the other, it is disincentivising them from coming back and parking these funds with the RBI.
2. **LTRO benefits:** It provides more liquidity. More importantly, it also provides it targeted to those institutions that are most hit by the economic slowdown and, as such, most in need of funds to survive themselves and boost economic activity at the bottom of the pyramid (that is, the poorest customers).
3. **With reduced LCR**, banks would have more cash to deal with.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is Liquidity Coverage Ratio?
2. What does 100 per cent LCR mean?
3. How are NPAs classified?
4. Classification of NBFCs?
5. What are Ways and Means Advances (WMA)?
6. SIDBI vs NHB?
7. What is TLTRO?
8. Trends in differences between repo and reverse repo?

Mains Link:

Amidst the global lockdown, while the rest of the world is certain to contract, India is hoping to be one of the few countries that expand their overall GDP, regardless of how small that increase may be. Discuss.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-how-rbi-is-handling-the-great-lockdown-6366699/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

Monetary antidote



- RBI provides special refinance facility of ₹25,000 crore to NABARD for refinancing regional rural banks, cooperative banks and micro finance institutions; ₹15,000 crore to SIDBI for on-lending and refinancing; and ₹10,000 crore to NHB for supporting housing finance companies
- Banks can avail themselves of ₹50,000 crore through targeted long term repo operation (TLTRO)
- They must invest funds from TLTRO in investment grade bonds, commercial paper, and non-convertible debentures of NBFCs
- Small, mid-sized NBFCs and micro finance institutions should receive at least 50% of these funds
- Of this, 10% to be invested in MFI securities, 15% in securities issued by NBFCs with asset size of ₹500 crore and below; and 25% in securities of NBFCs with asset sizes in the ₹500 crore-₹5,000 crore range

7. What Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)?

What to study?

For Prelims: MPC- composition, objectives and functions.

For Mains: Significance of monetary policy, role of RBI and how is it managed?

Context: The rate-setting **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** will be meeting five times in FY21, against seven in FY20.

Usually, the MPC meets six times a year. But, in FY20, it had an extra meeting in view of **the pandemic and the urgent need to assess the current and evolving macroeconomic situation**.

About MPC:

The RBI has a **government-constituted Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** which is tasked with framing monetary policy using tools like the repo rate, reverse repo rate, bank rate, cash reserve ratio (CRR).

It has been instituted by the Central Government of India under **Section 45ZB of the RBI Act that was amended in 1934**.

Functions:

The MPC is entrusted with the responsibility of deciding the different policy rates including MSF, Repo Rate, Reverse Repo Rate, and Liquidity Adjustment Facility.

Composition of MPC:

- The committee will have six members. Of the six members, the government will nominate three. No government official will be nominated to the MPC.
- The other three members would be from the RBI with the governor being the ex-officio chairperson. Deputy governor of RBI in charge of the monetary policy will be a member, as also an executive director of the central bank.

Selection and term of members:

Selection: The government nominees to the MPC will be selected by a Search-cum-Selection Committee under Cabinet Secretary with RBI Governor and Economic Affairs Secretary and three experts in the field of economics or banking or finance or monetary policy as its members.

Term: Members of the MPC will be appointed for a period of four years and shall not be eligible for reappointment.

How decisions are made?

Decisions will be taken by majority vote with each member having a vote.

RBI governor's role: The RBI Governor will chair the committee. The governor, however, will not enjoy a veto power to overrule the other panel members, but will have a casting vote in case of a tie.

What is RBI Monetary Policy?

The term 'Monetary Policy' is the Reserve Bank of India's policy pertaining to the deployment of monetary resources under its control for the purpose of achieving GDP growth and lowering the inflation rate.

The Reserve Bank of India Act 1934 empowers the RBI to make the monetary policy.

What the Monetary Policy intends to achieve?

As per the suggestions made by **Chakravarty Committee**, aspects such as price stability, economic growth, equity, social justice, and encouraging the growth of new financial enterprises are some crucial roles connected to the monetary policy of India.

- While the Government of India tries to accelerate the GDP growth rate of India, the RBI keeps trying to bring down the rate of inflation within a sustainable limit.
- In order to achieve its main objectives, the Monetary Policy Committee determines the ideal policy interest rate that will help achieve the inflation target in front of the country.

Monetary Policy Instruments and how they are managed?

Monetary policy instruments are of two types namely **qualitative instruments and quantitative instruments**.

The list of quantitative instruments includes Open Market Operations, Bank Rate, Repo Rate, Reverse Repo Rate, Cash Reserve Ratio, Statutory Liquidity Ratio, Marginal Standing Facility and Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF).

Qualitative Instruments refer to direct action, change in the margin money and moral suasion.

Sources: the Hindu.

8. Operation Twist

What to study?

For Prelims: Meaning, process and implications.

For Mains: Significance and associated concerns.

Context: The Reserve bank of India has decided to bring back its bond swapping programme billed as India's Operation Twist with an aim to help monetary transmission.

The RBI said that it will conduct purchase and sale of government securities under **open market operations (OMO)** for Rs10,000 crore each on 27 April.

What is 'Operation Twist'?

'Operation Twist' is RBI's **simultaneous selling of short-term securities and buying of long term securities through open market operations (OMO)**. Under this mechanism, the short-term securities are transitioned into long-term securities.

How does RBI manage 'Operation Twist'?

1. This operation involves buying and selling government securities simultaneously in order to bring down long-term interest rates and bolster short-term rates.
2. There is an **inverse relationship between the bond prices and their yields**. As the central bank buys long-term securities (bonds), their demand rises which in turn pushes up their prices.
3. However, the bond yield comes down with an increase in prices. Yield is the return an investor gets on his (bond) holding/investment.
4. **The interest rate in an economy is determined by yield**. Thus, lower long-term interest rates mean people can avail long-term loans (such as buying houses, cars or financing projects) at lower rates.
5. **This also results in a dip in the expected returns from long-term savings** which tilts the balance from saving towards spending. Hence, cheaper retail loans can help encourage consumption spending which is the largest GDP component in the economy.

How does it affect investors?

- Fixed income investors with higher exposure to long term debt will benefit from easing yield of long-term bonds.
- Consumers/borrowers will also profit from 'Operation Twist' as the retail loans will now get cheaper.
- Previously banks were forced to price their retail loans at higher rates owing to high yields on long-term government borrowings. Cheaper retail loans mean a boost in consumption and spending in the economy which in turn will revive growth.

What are Open Market Operations?

The RBI manages and controls the liquidity, rupee strength and monetary management through purchase and sale of **government securities (G-Secs)** in a monetary tool called **Open market Operations**.

- OMOs are the market operations conducted by the RBI by way of sale and purchase of G-Secs to and from the market with an objective to adjust the rupee liquidity conditions in the market on a durable basis.
- When the RBI feels that there is excess liquidity in the market, it resorts to sale of securities thereby sucking out the rupee liquidity. Similarly, when the liquidity conditions are tight, the RBI may buy securities from the market, thereby releasing liquidity into the market. On Friday, the yield on 10-year benchmark bonds fell by 13 bps to 6.60 per cent, following the RBI announcement.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Types of Government securities?
2. What are T- Bills?
3. Which government securities carry interest?
4. Which securities are sold at discounted price?
5. Difference between monetary vs fiscal policies.

Mains Link:

Discuss the significance of Operation Twist being conducted by RBI.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/business/rbi-to-restart-operation-twist-to-manage-yields/article31418091.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

1. Business Correspondents

What to study?

For Prelims: What are CSCs and who are BCs, BCs- objectives, eligibility and functions.

For Mains: Significance and measures for financial inclusion.

Context: SHG women working as **Business Correspondents for banks (BC Sakhis)** and **Bank Sakhis** playing a vital role in disbursement of first tranche of ex-gratia of Rs.500/- to women **PMJDY** accounts amidst COVID-19 Lockdown.

Who are Business Correspondents?

Business Correspondents are **retail agents engaged by banks for providing banking services at locations other than a bank branch/ATM**.

Banks are required to take full responsibility for the acts of omission and commission of the BCs that they engage and have, therefore, to ensure thorough due diligence and additional safeguards for minimizing the agency risk.

What they can do?

- BCs are permitted to perform a variety of activities which include identification of borrowers, collection and preliminary processing of loan applications including verification of primary information/data, creating awareness about savings and other products, education and advice on managing money and

debt counseling, processing and submission of applications to banks, promoting, nurturing and monitoring of Self Help Groups/ Joint Liability Groups, post-sanction monitoring, follow-up of recovery.

- They can also attend to collection of small value deposit, disbursal of small value credit, recovery of principal / collection of interest, sale of micro insurance/ mutual fund products/ pension products/ other third party products and receipt and delivery of small value remittances/ other payment instruments.

Who can be engaged as BCs?- The banks may engage the following individuals/entities as BC:

1. Individuals like retired bank employees, retired teachers, retired government employees and ex-servicemen, individual owners of kirana / medical /Fair Price shops, individual Public Call Office (PCO) operators, agents of Small Savings schemes of Government of India/Insurance Companies, individuals who own Petrol Pumps, authorized functionaries of well run Self Help Groups (SHGs) which are linked to banks, any other individual including those operating Common Service Centres (CSCs).
2. NGOs/ MFIs set up under Societies/ Trust Acts and Section 25 Companies.
3. Cooperative Societies registered under Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies Acts/ Cooperative Societies Acts of States/Multi State Cooperative Societies Act.
4. Post Offices.
5. Companies registered under the Indian Companies Act, 1956 with large and widespread retail outlets, excluding Non Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who can be engaged as BCs?
2. What are CSCs?
3. Eligibility for PMJDY.
4. Benefits under PMJDY.

Mains Link:

Who are Business Correspondents? Discuss their significance and role in enhancing financial inclusion in the country.

Sources: pib.

Topics: *Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.*

1. National Agriculture Market

What to study?

For Prelims: NAM- features.

For Mains: Need for and significance.

Context: Union Agriculture Minister launches new features of **e-NAM** platform.

They are important steps in our fight against COVID-19.

- They will strengthen agriculture marketing & reduce the need for cultivators to physically come to the mandis to sell their produce.

The newly launched software modules are namely:

- (i) Warehouse based trading module in e-NAM software to facilitate trade from warehouses based on e-NWR.
- (ii) FPO trading module in e-NAM whereby FPOs can trade their produce from their collection center without bringing the produce to APMC.
- (iii) Enhanced version of logistic module has been released whereby aggregators of transport logistic platform have been onboarded which helps users to avail trackable transport facilities for transporting their produce.

What is e-NAM?

E-NAM (National Agriculture Market) is an online trading platform for agriculture produce aiming to help farmers, traders, and buyers with online trading and getting a better price by smooth marketing. It was **launched by the Centre in 2015** and the government had to extend it in a phased manner across the 585 mandis of the country by December 31, 2019.

Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) is the lead agency for implementing eNAM under the aegis of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India.

NAM has the following advantages:

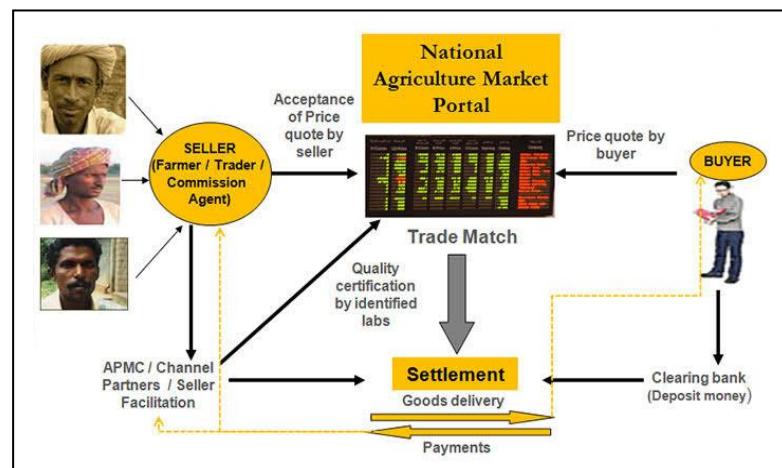
For the farmers, NAM promises more options for sale. It would increase his access to markets through warehouse-based sales and thus obviate the need to transport his produce to the mandi.

For the local trader in the mandi / market, NAM offers the opportunity to access a larger national market for secondary trading.

Bulk buyers, processors, exporters etc.

benefit from being able to participate directly in trading at the local mandi / market level through the NAM platform, thereby reducing their intermediation costs.

- The gradual integration of all the major mandis in the States into NAM will ensure common procedures for issue of licences, levy of fee and movement of produce.
- The NAM will also facilitate the emergence of value chains in major agricultural commodities across the country and help to promote scientific storage and movement of agri goods.



Need for:

- Fragmentation of state into multiple market areas.
- Poor quality of infrastructure and low use of technology.
- In the traditional mandi system, farmers generally procured very less price for their crops as they had to pass through various intermediaries at the physical marketplace. This not only adds costs but also handling costs.
- In addition, the farmer has to face obstacles in form of multiple tax levies and licenses and weak logistics and infrastructure in India.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who implements eNAM?
2. Composition of SFAC.
3. Which states have not implemented eNAM?
4. What are APMCs? How are they administered?

Mains Link:

Write a note on the National Agriculture Market (eNAM).

Sources: pib.

2. Krishi Kalyan Abhiyaan

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the scheme.

Context: The **Krishi Kalyan Abhiyan (KKA)** is being implemented in 112 Aspirational districts of the country.

About Krishi Kalyan Abhiyan:

Launched in **2018** under the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare**.

Aim: to aid, assist and advise farmers to improve their farming techniques and increase their incomes.

Implementation:

1. Krishi kalyan Abhiyaan will be undertaken in **25 Villages with more than 1000 population each in Aspirational Districts** identified in consultation with Ministry of Rural Development as per directions of NITI Ayog.
2. In districts where number of villages (with more than 1000 population) is less than 25, all villages will be covered.
3. The overall coordination and implementation in the 25 villages of a district is being done by **Krishi Vigyan Kendra** of that district.

Various activities to promote best practices and enhance agriculture income are being undertaken under this plan such as:

1. Distribution of Soil Health Cards to all farmers
2. 100% coverage of bovine vaccination for Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in each village
3. 100% coverage of Sheep and Goat for eradication of Peste des Petits ruminants (PPR) also known as sheep and goat plague
4. Distribution of Mini Kits of pulses and oilseeds to all
5. Distribution of Horticulture/Agro Forestry/Bamboo plant @ 5 per family(location appropriate)
6. Making 100 NADAP Pits in each village
7. Artificial insemination saturation
8. Demonstration programmes on Micro- irrigation
9. Demonstrations of integrated cropping practice

Sources: pib.

3. Swamitva Yojana to boost rural economy

What to study?

For Prelims: Key features of the scheme.

For Mains: Uniqueness and significance of the scheme.

Context: On **Panchayati Raj Diwas (April 24th)**, the Prime Minister of India launched '**Swamitva Yojana**' or **Ownership Scheme** to map residential land ownership in the rural sector using modern technology like the use of drones.

The scheme **aims to revolutionise property record maintenance in India**.

Overview and key features of the 'Swamitva Yojana':

The scheme is **piloted by the Panchayati Raj ministry**.

The residential land in villages will be measured using drones **to create a non-disputable record**.

Property card for every property in the village will be prepared by states using accurate measurements delivered by drone-mapping. These cards will be given to property owners and will be recognised by the land revenue records department.

Benefits of the scheme:

- The delivery of property rights through an official document will enable villagers to access bank finance using their property as collateral.
- The property records for a village will also be maintained at the Panchayat level, allowing for the collection of associated taxes from the owners. The money generated from these local taxes will be used to build rural infrastructure and facilities.
- Freeing the residential properties including land of title disputes and the creation of an official record is likely to result in appreciation in the market value of the properties.
- The accurate property records can be used for facilitating tax collection, new building and structure plan, issuing of permits and for thwarting attempts at property grabbing.

Need for and significance of the scheme:

The need for this Yojana was felt since several villagers in the rural areas don't have papers proving ownership of their land. In most states, survey and measurement of the populated areas in the villages has not been done for the purpose of attestation/verification of properties.

The new scheme is likely to become a tool for empowerment and entitlement, reducing social strife on account of discord over properties.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. When and why is Panchayati Raj Diwas is celebrated?
2. As per the scheme, who issues property cards?
3. Various benefits under the scheme.
4. Nodal Ministry to implement the scheme.

Sources: pib.

Topics: *Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.*

1. MSP for MFP

What to study?

For Prelims: What is MSP? MFP? Scheme related?

For Mains: Significance of the scheme and MFP for tribals.

Context: TRIFED asks State Nodal Departments & Implementing Agencies to initiate procurement from available funds under '**MSP for MFP scheme**'.

Significance:

Such measures are necessary for mitigating the impact of lockdown on tribal communities.

This will provide much required livelihood support to the tribal gatherers and obviate the movement of middlemen from urban areas to tribal habitations, thus checking any eventuality of spread of corona virus among tribal communities.

What is this scheme all about?

The Union Cabinet, in 2013, approved a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** for marketing of non-nationalized / non monopolized Minor Forest Produce (MFP) and development of a value chain for **MFP through Minimum Support Price (MSP)**.

- This was a **measure towards social safety for MFP gatherers**, who are primarily members of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) most of them in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) areas.
- The scheme had Rs. 967.28 crore as Central Government share and Rs. 249.50 crore as the States share for the current Plan period.

Key features of the scheme:

Ensure that the tribal population gets a remunerative price for the produce they collect from the forest and provide alternative employment avenues to them.

- Establish a system to ensure fair monetary returns for forest dweller's efforts in collection, primary processing, storage, packaging, transportation etc, while ensuring sustainability of the resource base.
- Get them a share of revenue from the sales proceeds with costs deducted.

Coverage:

Earlier, the scheme was extended only to Scheduled Areas in eight states and fixed MSPs for 12 MFPs. Later expanded to all states and UTs. Total number of MFPs covered under the list include more than 40 items.

Implementation:

The responsibility of purchasing MFP on MSP will be with State designated agencies.

1. To ascertain market price, services of market correspondents would be availed by the designated agencies particularly for major markets trading in MFP.
2. The scheme supports primary value addition as well as provides for supply chain infrastructure like cold storage, warehouses etc.
3. **The Ministry of Tribal Affairs will be the nodal Ministry for implementation** and monitoring of the scheme. The Minimum Support Price would be determined by the Ministry with technical help of TRIFED.

Significance of the scheme:

The Minor Forest Produce (MFP), also known as Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP), is a major source of livelihood and provides essential food, nutrition, medicinal needs and cash income to a large number of STs who live in and around forests. An estimated 100 million forest dwellers depend on the Minor Forest Produce for food, shelter, medicines, cash income, etc.

However, MFP production is highly dispersed spatially because of the poor accessibility of these areas and competitive market not having evolved. Consequently, MFP gatherers who are mostly poor are unable to bargain for fair prices. This package of intervention can help in organizing unstructured MFP markets.

Insta Link:**Prelims Link:**

1. Who decides about Products to be covered under MFP?
2. How many products are currently covered under MFP?
3. Permission for collection of MFPs inside National Parks and other protected areas?
4. Centrally sponsored vs Central Sector schemes.
5. Who decides on MSP?

Mains Link:

Recognition of tribal rights over non-timber forest products (NTFPs) would accelerate empowerment of the poor and marginalised. Comment.

Sources: pib.

2. PM KISAN

What to study?

For Prelims: Features of the scheme.

For Mains: Significance and performance of the scheme.

Context: Under PM-KISAN Scheme Rs. 17,793 crores released for 8.89 crore farmers families during the lockdown.

About Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi:

It is implemented as a **central sector scheme** by the Government of India.

This scheme was introduced to augment the source of income of many small and marginal farmers.

Under the Scheme **an amount of Rs.6000/- per year is transferred** directly into the bank accounts of the farmers, subject to certain exclusion criteria relating to higher income status.

The entire **responsibility of identification of beneficiaries rests with the State / UT Governments.**

Ambit:

The Scheme initially provided income support to all Small and Marginal Farmers' families across the country, holding cultivable land upto 2 hectares. Its ambit was later expanded w.e.f. 01.06.2019 **to cover all farmer families in the country irrespective of the size of their land holdings.**

Exceptions:

Affluent farmers have been excluded from the scheme such as Income Tax payers in last assessment year, professionals like Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Chartered Accountants etc and pensioners pensioners drawing at least Rs.10,000/- per month (excluding MTS/Class IV/Group D employees).

Similar programmes by states:

1. Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana- MP.
2. The Rythu Bandhu scheme- Telangana.
3. Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income augmentation (KALIA)- Odisha.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

1. Draft Electricity Act (Amendment) Bill, 2020

What to study?

For Prelims: Key amendments proposed, overview of Electricity Act, 2003.

For Mains: Need for and significance of these amendments.

Context: Power Ministry floats **draft Electricity Act**; invites suggestions within 21 days. This will amend the 2003 act.

The draft pitches for privatisation of distribution companies, cost-reflective electricity tariff without subsidy, strengthening of payment security mechanism and Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority to bring in investment and ease of doing business in the power sector.

Background:

This is the **fourth draft of the Electricity (Amendment) Bill since 2014**.

- The government had brought first draft in 2014 that was introduced in the Lok Sabha seeking separate carriage and contend electricity distribution business.
- The Bill could have given option to consumers to change their service providers like they do for their mobile phone service. But, unfortunately, that Bill lapsed after dissolution of the Lok Sabha.
- The second and third drafts were circulated in 2018 and 2019.

Key provisions in the bill:

1. The draft proposes to **privatise discoms by way of sub-licensing and franchisee models**. The sub-licensing will allow states to choose a private company for the distribution of electricity supply of a particular area to help it bring down losses of both electricity and finances.
The bill proposes to **restrict deferment of revenue recovery and reduction in cross-subsidy** to bring in a cost-reflective tariff, simplified tariff.
2. It also proposes to **bring in an Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority (ECEA)** to deal with the issues of non-performance of contracts leading to uncertainty.
3. For the renewable sector, the draft proposes to **bring National Renewable Energy Policy** and may bring in a minimum percentage of the purchase for the states from renewable sources.
4. The bill **enables state as well as central power regulators to specify transmission charges under open access**. Earlier, both functions were with the central commission.
5. It also provides additional roles to the **National Load Despatch Centre** that include scheduling and dispatch of power across the country in accordance with contracts.
6. It also provides that **the cross (power) border trade shall cover import or export of electricity from India and any other country**. The transaction related to passage of electricity through India would be treated as **transit between two other countries**.
7. The Bill also provides that **the Electricity Act would be applicable to the entire country, including the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh**.

Composition and powers of Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority:

- The Authority will be headed by a retired Judge of the High Court.
- It is proposed to be set-up with powers of the Civil Court.

- It will enforce performance of contracts related to purchase or sale or transmission of power between a generating, distribution or transmission companies.

Significance of these amendments:

- The proposed amendments are progressive, transformative and formulated with the objective to remove the regulatory impediments/shortcomings that were being experienced in sectoral functioning.
- Creation of Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority with power of civil court, including arrest, attachment of property, enforcement of decree etc. will help to instil discipline amongst the contracting parties to adhere to their contractual obligations which was amiss in current environment.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Composition of the proposed Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority.
2. Key functions of ECEA.
3. How DISCOMS in the country function?
4. What is the National Load Despatch Centre?
5. Composition and functions of the Appellate Tribunal (APTEL).

Mains Link:

Discuss the key features and significance of Draft Electricity Act (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

Sources: pib.

2. Hydrogen Fuel

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Hydrogen as Fuel- properties, significance, disadvantages and potential.

Context: NTPC Ltd, India's largest power producer and a central PSU under Ministry of Power, has invited Global Expression of Interest (EoI) to provide 10 Hydrogen Fuel Cell (FC) based electric buses and an equal number of Hydrogen Fuel Cell based electric cars in Leh and Delhi.

The move to procure Hydrogen Fuel Cell based vehicles is **first of its kind project in the country, wherein a complete solution from green energy to the fuel cell vehicle would be developed.**

What is Hydrogen fuel?

Hydrogen is **the lightest and first element on the periodic table**. Since **the weight of hydrogen is less than air, it rises in the atmosphere and is therefore rarely found in its pure form, H₂**.

At standard temperature and pressure, **hydrogen is a nontoxic, nonmetallic, odorless, tasteless, colorless, and highly combustible diatomic gas**.

Hydrogen fuel is a **zero-emission fuel burned with oxygen**. It can be **used in fuel cells or internal combustion engines**. It is also **used as a fuel for spacecraft propulsion**.

Occurrence of Hydrogen:

It is the **most abundant element in the universe**. The sun and other stars are composed largely of hydrogen. Astronomers estimate that **90% of the atoms in the universe are hydrogen atoms**. Hydrogen is a **component of more compounds than any other element**.

Water is the most abundant compound of hydrogen found on earth.

Molecular hydrogen is not available on Earth in convenient natural reservoirs. Most hydrogen on Earth is bonded to oxygen in water and to carbon in live or dead and/or fossilized biomass. **It can be created by splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen**.

Storage:

Hydrogen can be stored physically as either a gas or a liquid. Storage of hydrogen as a gas typically requires high-pressure tanks. Storage of hydrogen as a liquid requires cryogenic temperatures because the boiling point of hydrogen at one atmosphere pressure is -252.8°C . Hydrogen can also be stored on the surfaces of solids (by adsorption) or within solids (by absorption).

Potential of clean hydrogen industry in reducing greenhouse gas emissions:

1. Hydrogen as a fuel has long been touted as an almost magical solution to air pollution crisis. The only by-product or emission that results from the usage of hydrogen fuel is water — making the fuel 100 per cent clean.
2. Hydrogen is considered an alternative fuel. It is due to its ability to power fuel cells in zero-emission electric vehicles, its potential for domestic production, and the fuel cell's potential for high efficiency.
3. In fact, a fuel cell coupled with an electric motor is two to three times more efficient than an internal combustion engine running on gasoline.
4. Hydrogen can also serve as fuel for internal combustion engines.
5. The energy in 2.2 pounds (1 kilogram) of hydrogen gas contains about the same as the energy in 1 gallon (6.2 pounds, 2.8 kilograms) of gasoline.

Benefits of hydrogen as a fuel:

1. It is readily available.
2. It doesn't produce harmful emissions.
3. It is environmentally friendly and is a non-toxic substance.
4. It can be used as fuel in rockets.
5. Hydrogen is three times as powerful as gasoline and other fossil fuels. This means that it can accomplish more with less.
6. It is fuel efficient. Compared to diesel or gas, it is much more fuel efficient as it can produce more energy per pound of fuel.
7. It is renewable. It can be produced again and again, unlike other non-renewable sources of energy.

Limitations to Hydrogen production:

1. Hydrogen does not occur in deposits or reserves like fossil fuel. It needs to be actually produced using chemical reactions.
2. Hydrogen, using renewables, is far more expensive to produce. And hydrogen-fueled vehicles are also more expensive than even battery-electric ones.
3. It is highly flammable. It is difficult to store.
4. The clean hydrogen industry is small and costs are high. There is a big potential for costs to fall, but the use of hydrogen needs to be scaled up and a network of supply infrastructure created.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

1. National Innovation Foundation

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: NIF- objectives, awards and achievements.

Context: NIF invite innovative citizens to participate in Challenge COVID-19 Competition (C3).

The initiative will not only create awareness, but will intimately engage a wide cross-section of society with diverse backgrounds in providing and implementing solutions.

About National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India:

It is an autonomous body of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India.

Set up in February 2000 at Ahmedabad, Gujarat to provide institutional support for scouting, spawning, sustaining and scaling up the grassroots innovations across the country.

It is India's national initiative to strengthen the grassroots technological innovations and outstanding traditional knowledge.

Its mission is to help India become a creative and knowledge-based society by expanding policy and institutional space for grassroots technological innovators.

Related key facts:

1. The **INSPIRE Award - MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspiration and Knowledge)** is being revamped and executed by Department of Science & Technology and National Innovation Foundation-India to align it with the action plan for "Start-up India" initiative.
2. **Micro Venture Innovation Fund (MVIF)** at NIF, with support from Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), has provided risk capital to 230 innovation based enterprise projects, some of which are at different stages of incubation.
3. Being organised since 2008, **IGNITE** is an annual competition for student's ideas and innovations conducted by NIF in partnership with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).
4. NIF has set up a Technology Business Incubator (NIF) - **NIF Incubation and Entrepreneurship Council (NIFentreC)**.

Sources: pib.

2. Novel blood plasma therapy for COVID-19

What to study?

For Prelims: About the test, how is it carried out?

For Mains: Need for, significance and challenges involved.

Context: India has taken a bold step to provide innovative treatment to patients suffering from COVID-19 disease- **plasma therapy**.

Technically called "**convalescent-plasma therapy**", the treatment aims at using the immune power gained by a recovered person to treat a sick person.

But, before understanding more about the therapy, let's see how our immune system works?

When a pathogen like novel coronavirus infects, our immune systems produce **antibodies**.

Like the police dogs, the antibodies span out to identify and mark the invading virus.

White blood cells attach the identified intruders, and the body gets rid of the infection.

But, what are antibodies?

Antibodies are one of the front-line immune response to an infection by a microbe. They are a particular type of **proteins secreted by immune cells called B lymphocytes** when they encounter an invader, such as a novel coronavirus.

The immune system designs antibodies that are highly specific to each invading pathogen. **A particular antibody and its partner virus are made for each other.**

How plasma therapy works?

1. Blood is drawn from a person who has recovered from COVID-19 sickness.
2. The serum is separated and screened for virus-neutralizing antibodies.
3. **Convalescent serum**, that is the blood serum obtained from one who has recovered from an infectious disease and especially rich in antibodies for that pathogen, is then administered to a COVID-19 patient.
4. The sick acquires **passive immunisation**.

When was it previously used? How effective has it been?

We have effective **antibiotics** against bacterial infection. However, we do not have effective **antivirals**.

Whenever a new viral outbreak takes places, there are no drugs to treat it. Hence, **the convalescent serum has been used during past viral epidemics.**

- 2009–2010 H1N1 influenza virus pandemic.
- The Ebola outbreak in 2018.

How long the antibodies will remain in the recipient?

After the antibody serum is given, it will stay on the recipient for at least **three to four days**. During this period, the sick person will recover. Various studies have confirmed this.

Difference between this therapy and vaccination?

This therapy is akin to **passive immunization**. When a vaccine is administered, the immune system produces the antibodies.

Here, **the effect lasts only up to the time the antibodies injected remain in the bloodstream**. The protection given is temporary.

Whereas, **Vaccination provides lifelong immunity**.

For example, the mother transfers antibodies through breast milk to an infant before the child could build her own immunity.

Related fact:

In 1890, **Emil von Behring**, a German physiologist, discovered that the serum obtained from a rabbit infected with diphtheria was effective in preventing the diphtheria infection. Behring was awarded **the first-ever Nobel prize for medicine in 1901**.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Differences between vaccination and plasma therapy?
2. What is passive immunisation?
3. What are antibodies and antigens?
4. First Nobel prize in medicine?

Mains Link:

Discuss the significance of convalescent plasma therapy.

Sources: pib.

3. CollabCAD

What to study?

For Prelims: AIM, ATL and their important features, what is CollabCAD?

For Mains: Various initiatives to promote innovation and their significance.

Context: Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog & National Informatics Centre (NIC) jointly launched **CollabCAD** in ATL schools.

What is CollabCAD?

- It is a collaborative network, computer enabled software system, providing a total engineering solution from 2D drafting & detailing to 3D product design.
- The aim of this initiative is **to provide a great platform to students of Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) across country to create and modify 3d designs with free flow of creativity and imagination**.
- This software would also enable students to create data across the network and concurrently access the same design data for storage and visualization.

Tinker from Home campaign:

- In light of the current situation, the ATL program has launched a '**Tinker from Home**' campaign to ensure that the children across the country have access to useful easy-to-learn online resources to keep themselves fruitfully occupied.
- The objective of the initiative is **to harness the creativity and innovativeness of children by encouraging learning through self-initiation**.

What are ATLs?

With a vision to '**Cultivate one Million children in India as Neoteric Innovators**', Atal Innovation Mission is establishing Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) in schools across India.

Objective: The objective of this scheme is to foster curiosity, creativity and imagination in young minds; and inculcate skills such as design mindset, computational thinking, adaptive learning, physical computing etc.

Financial Support: AIM will provide grant-in-aid that includes a one-time establishment cost of Rs. 10 lakh and operational expenses of Rs. 10 lakh for a maximum period of 5 years to each ATL.

Eligibility:

- Schools (minimum Grade VI – X) managed by Government, local body or private trusts/society can set up ATL.
- The applicant school would have to provide at least 1,500 Sq. Ft. of built up space. Applicant schools from hilly / Himalayan and island states, UTs would have to provide atleast 1,000 Sq. Ft. of built up space.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. Who can setup ATLs?
2. What is the financial support given for setting up of ATLs?
3. Aim and objectives of Tinker from Home campaign?
4. What is NIC?
5. Who heads NITI Aayog?

Mains Link:

Discuss the objectives and significance of Atal Tinkering Labs.

Sources: pib.

4. Software Technology Parks of India (STPI)

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: STPI- features, objectives and significance.

Context: In light of the current coronavirus pandemic, the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** has decided to provide rental waiver to IT companies housed in **STPI** premises in the country from March to June, i.e., for 4 months period as of now.

About Software Technology Parks of India (STPI):

It is an autonomous society under **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)**, Govt. of India. It was established in 1991 with the objective of encouraging, promoting and boosting the export of software from India.

The STPI's **Governing Council's Chairperson is the Union Minister for Electronics & Information Technology.**

The objectives of the Software Technology Parks of India are:

1. To promote the development and export of software and software services including Information Technology (IT) enabled services/ Bio- IT.
2. To provide statutory and other promotional services to the exporters by implementing Software Technology Parks (STP)/ Electronics and Hardware Technology Parks (EHTP) Schemes, SEZ scheme and other such schemes which may be formulated and entrusted by the Government from time to time.
3. To provide data communication services including value added services to IT / IT enabled Services (ITES) related industries.
4. To promote micro, small and medium entrepreneurs by creating conducive environment for entrepreneurship in the field of IT/ITES.
5. To establish and manage infrastructure resources such as Datacom facilities, Project Management and Consultancy and IT support facilities.

Sources: pib.

5. TriboE masks and triboelectricity

What to study?

For Prelims: Features, how they work and what is triboelectricity?

For Mains: Need for and significance of such masks.

Context: A team of researchers at the **Centre for Nano and Soft Matter Sciences (CeNS)**, Bangalore, an **autonomous institute of the Department of Science and Technology (DST)**, have come up with a recipe for making face masks, termed as **TriboE Mask**, that can hold electric charges to restrict the entry of infections but interestingly, without any external power.

How they operate or work?

It relies on **electrostatics**. When **two non-conducting layers are rubbed against each other, the layers develop positive and negative charges instantly and continue to hold the charges for some time**. This electric field, quite strong at proximity, is used to deactivate or possibly even kill the germs.

Key features of these masks:

1. The mask is **three-layered – a layer of nylon cloth sandwiched between polypropylene layers**, the latter sourced from commonly used non woven grocery bags.
2. In place of nylon, silk fabric from an old saree or shawl may also be cut and used.
3. When layers are rubbed against each other, the outer layers develop negative charges, while nylon will hold the positive charges.
4. This will act as double electric wall protection against the infectious entities crossing.
5. As the mask is made out of commonly available fabrics, it can be washed just like any other cloth and can be reused.

What is triboelectric effects?

Also known as **triboelectric charging**, it is a type of **contact electrification** on which certain materials become electrically charged after they are separated from a different material with which they were in contact. Rubbing the two materials each with the other increases the contact between their surfaces, and hence the triboelectric effect.

Examples:

A very familiar example could be **the rubbing of a plastic pen on a sleeve of almost any typical material like cotton, wool, polyester, or blended fabric used in modern clothing**. Such an electrified pen would readily attract and pick up pieces of paper less than a square centimeter when the pen approaches. Also, such a pen will repel a similarly electrified pen.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What is triboelectricity?
2. Examples of triboelectric effect?
3. What kind of organisation is CeNS?
4. Difference between bacteria and virus?

Mains Link:

Discuss the significance of triboelectric effect.

Sources: pib.

6. Reverse Vaccinology

What to study?

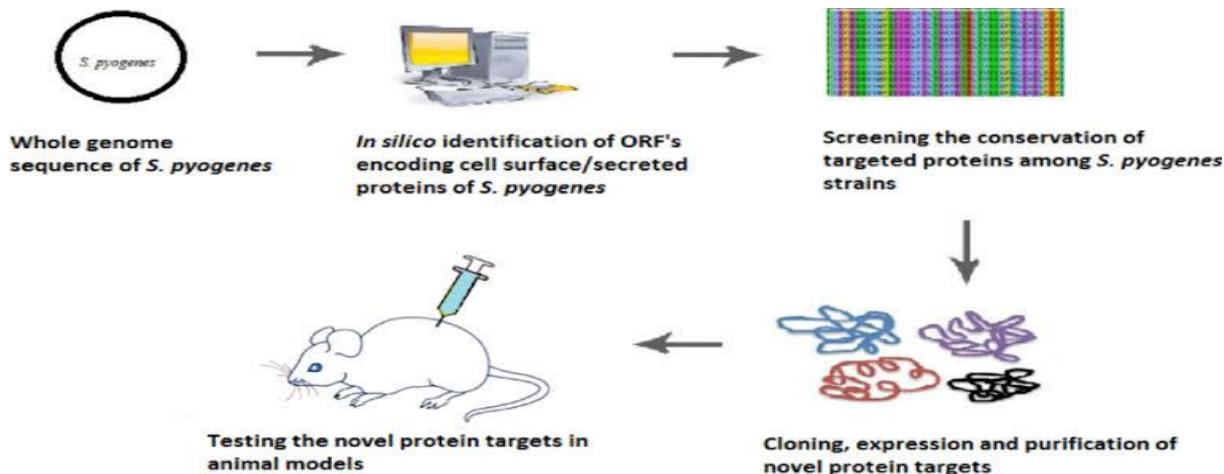
For Prelims and Mains: How it works, significance and concerns.

Context: Researchers from Tamil Nadu have developed a **vaccine candidate** against SARS-CoV-2 through 'reverse vaccinology'.

Previously, Reverse vaccinology has been used for developing vaccinations for **meningococcal and staphylococcal infections**.

What is reverse vaccinology?

1. Reverse vaccinology defines the process of antigen discovery starting from genome information.
2. This is done with the aid of computers without culturing microorganism.
3. The process includes comparative **in silico analyses of multiple genome sequences** in order to identify conserved antigens within a heterogeneous pathogen population and identification of antigens that are unique to pathogenic isolates but not present in commensal strains.
4. In addition, **transcriptomic and proteomic data sets are integrated into a selection process** that yields a short list of candidate antigens to be tested in animal models, thus reducing the costs and time of downstream analyses.



Pros:

Finding vaccine targets quickly and efficiently.

Cons:

Only proteins can be targeted using this process. Whereas, conventional vaccinology approaches can find other biomolecular targets such as polysaccharides.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/coronavirus-mgr-medical-university-develops-vaccine-candidate/article31410701.ece>

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Awareness in space.

1. SunRISE mission

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Overview and significance of the mission.

Context: NASA has selected a new mission to study how the Sun generates and releases giant space weather storms – known as **solar particle storms** – into planetary space.

Overview of the mission- the Sun Radio Interferometer Space Experiment (SunRISE):

It is an array of six CubeSats operating as one very large radio telescope.

NASA has awarded \$62.6 million to design, build and launch SunRISE by no earlier than July 1, 2023.

Objectives of the mission:

1. To study how the Sun creates and releases giant solar particle storms.
2. To help scientists understand the workings of the Solar System.

How it works?

The mission design relies on six **solar-powered CubeSats** to simultaneously observe radio images of low-frequency emission from solar activity and share them via **NASA's Deep Space Network**.

- The constellation of CubeSats would fly within 6 miles of each other, above Earth's atmosphere, which otherwise blocks the radio signals SunRISE will observe.
- Together, the six CubeSats will create 3D maps to pinpoint where giant particle bursts originate on the Sun and how they evolve as they expand outward into space.
- This, in turn, will help determine what initiates and accelerates these giant jets of radiation.
- The six individual spacecraft will also work together to map, for the first time, **the pattern of magnetic field lines reaching from the Sun out into interplanetary space.**

Why study solar particle storms?

This information will help improve understanding of how our solar system works.

It can help protect astronauts traveling to the Moon and Mars by providing better information on how the Sun's radiation affects the space environment they must travel through.

Background:

NASA had chosen two missions in August 2017 for its **Mission of Opportunity program**, a part of its Explorers Program, to conduct an 11-month concept study. The SunRISE mission was one of the two missions.

Sources: NASA.

2. GRACE-FO mission

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Key features and objectives of the mission.

Context: New satellite-based, weekly global maps of soil moisture and groundwater wetness conditions were developed by US space agency National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) on March 31, 2020.

How were these maps produced?

Data available from NASA and German Research Center for Geosciences' **Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow On (GRACE-FO) satellites** was used to derive these global maps.

- The satellite-based observations of changes in water distribution were integrated with other data within a computer model that simulated water and energy cycles.
- The model then produced — among other outputs — time-varying maps of the distribution of water at three depths: Surface soil moisture, root zone soil moisture (roughly the top three feet of soil) and shallow groundwater.
- The maps have a resolution of up to 8.5 miles, providing continuous data on moisture and groundwater conditions across the landscape.

Why do we need these data?

The scientific community believes data available through this project would **fill existing gaps in understanding the full picture of wet and dry conditions that can lead to drought.**

These tools are absolutely critical to helping us address and offset some of the impacts anticipated, whether it is from population growth, climate change or just increased water consumption in general.

The data would also help in **managing the selection of appropriate agricultural crops and predicting yields.**

About GRACE- FO mission:

The **Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow-on (GRACE-FO) mission** is a partnership between NASA and the German Research Centre for Geosciences (GFZ).

GRACE-FO is a successor to the original GRACE mission, which began orbiting Earth on March 17, 2002. The **GRACE missions measure variations in gravity over Earth's surface, producing a new map of the gravity field every 30 days.**

- GRACE-FO will continue the work of tracking Earth's water movement to monitor changes in underground water storage, the amount of water in large lakes and rivers, soil moisture, ice sheets and glaciers, and sea level caused by the addition of water to the ocean.

- These discoveries provide a unique view of Earth's climate and have far-reaching benefits to society and the world's population.

Link:

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/agriculture/nasa-releases-new-global-maps-mapping-groundwater-soil-wetness-70187>.

Sources: down to earth.

3. Artemis Program

What to study?

For Prelims: Key features and objectives of Artemis.

For Mains: Significance and relevance of the mission for future space programmes.

Context: NASA unveils plan for Artemis 'base camp' on the moon beyond 2024.

Artemis Base camp:

1. Artemis Base Camp is meant to be a long-term foothold for lunar exploration, perhaps in **Shackleton Crater** at the moon's south pole.
2. The Camp itself would be a lunar foundation surface habitat that could host four astronauts at the south pole for visits of perhaps a week.
3. In the long term, the facility would also require infrastructure for power, waste disposal and communications, as well as radiation shielding and a landing pad.
4. The base could also be a site for testing new techniques for dealing with pesky lunar dust and the long, cold lunar nights, turning local materials into resources like water, and developing new power and construction technologies.

What is Artemis?

Artemis– Acceleration, Reconnection, Turbulence and Electrodynamics of Moon's Interaction with the Sun.

It is **NASA's next mission to the Moon.**

Objective: To measure what happens when the Sun's radiation hits our rocky moon, where there is no magnetic field to protect it.

Artemis was **the twin sister of Apollo and goddess of the Moon in Greek mythology.**

Significance of the mission:

With the Artemis program, NASA will **land the first woman and next man on the Moon by 2024.**

Mission details:

1. NASA's powerful new rocket, the Space Launch System (SLS), will send astronauts aboard the Orion spacecraft nearly a quarter million miles from Earth to lunar orbit.
2. Astronauts will dock Orion at the Gateway and transfer to a human landing system for expeditions to the surface of the Moon.
3. They will return to the orbital outpost to board Orion again before returning safely to Earth.

Background- Artemis 1, 2:

The agency will fly two missions around the Moon to test its deep space exploration systems.

NASA is working toward launching Artemis I, an uncrewed flight to test the SLS and Orion spacecraft together, followed by the Artemis II mission, the first SLS and Orion test flight with crew. NASA will land astronauts on the Moon by 2024 on the Artemis III mission and about once a year thereafter.

Scientific objectives:

1. Find and use water and other critical resources needed for long-term exploration.
2. Investigate the Moon's mysteries and learn more about our home planet and the universe.
3. Learn how to live and operate on the surface of another celestial body where astronauts are just three days from home.

4. Prove the technologies we need before sending astronauts on missions to Mars, which can take up to three years roundtrip.



Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

- Names of various craters and their locations on moon.
- Manned missions to Moon so far.
- India's missions to moon.

Mains Link:

Write a note on NASA's Artemis program.

Sources: NASA.

4. Lithium rich red giants

What to study?

For Prelims: What are red giants and what is Li?

For Mains: Significance of these findings.

Context: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology, Govt. of India, have discovered hundreds of **Li-rich giant stars**. They have also associated such Li enhancement with **central He-burning stars**, also known as **red clump giants**, thereby opening up new vistas in the evolution of the red giant stars.

Implications:

This discovery indicates that Li is being produced in the stars and accounts for its abundance in the interstellar medium.

Identifying **sources of Li enrichment in our Galaxy** has been a great interest to researchers to validate **Big Bang Nucleosynthesis as well as a stellar mixing process**.

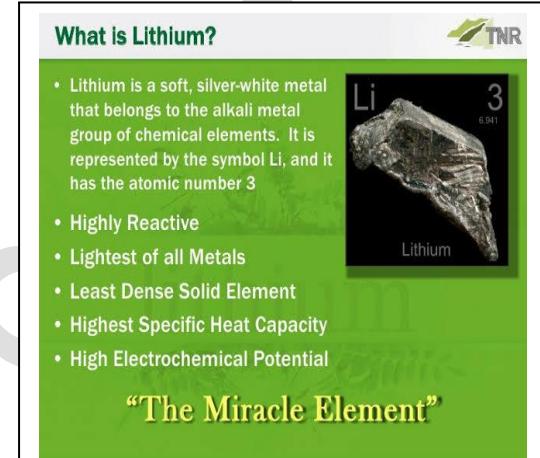
Background:

Lithium (Li), is **one of the three primordial elements**, apart from **Hydrogen and Helium (He)**, produced in **the big bang nucleosynthesis (BBN)**.

Li in stars:

Stars are proposed as likely Li source in the Galaxy. In general, **stars are considered as Li sinks**. This means that the original Li, with which stars are born, only gets depleted over stars' lifetime as Li burns at relatively very low temperatures of about 2.5×10^6 K – a range which is easily encountered in stars.

What is Lithium?



- Lithium is a soft, silver-white metal that belongs to the alkali metal group of chemical elements. It is represented by the symbol Li, and it has the atomic number 3
- Highly Reactive
- Lightest of all Metals
- Least Dense Solid Element
- Highest Specific Heat Capacity
- High Electrochemical Potential

"The Miracle Element"

What is the big bang nucleosynthesis (BBN)?

The Big Bang Nucleosynthesis theory predicts that roughly 25% the mass of the Universe consists of Helium. It also predicts about 0.01% deuterium, and even smaller quantities of lithium.

It is the production of nuclei other than those of the lightest isotope of hydrogen during the early phases of the Universe. **Primordial nucleosynthesis** is believed by most cosmologists to have **taken place in the interval from roughly 10 seconds to 20 minutes after the Big Bang**.

Sources: pib.

5. Artificial Neural Networks based global Ionospheric Model (ANNIM)

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: The model, how it operates and all about ionosphere.

Context: Researchers from **Indian Institute of Geomagnetism (IIG)**, Navi Mumbai, an autonomous institute of the Department of Science & Technology, Govt. of India, have developed a **global model to predict the ionospheric electron density** with larger data coverage—a crucial need for communication and navigation. The model- **Artificial Neural Networks based global Ionospheric Model (ANNIM)**- has been developed using long-term ionospheric observations to predict the ionospheric electron density and the peak parameters.

How it works?

Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs) replicate the processes in the human brain (or biological neurons) to solve problems such as pattern recognition, classification, clustering, generalization, linear and nonlinear data fitting, and time series prediction.

The **target (output) of ANNs is the electron density as a function of altitude for any given location and time**.

Potential:

1. ANNIM has successfully reproduced large scale anomalies of the ionosphere.

- It also captured the general morphological features of the ionosphere during disturbed space weather periods, such as geomagnetic storms which occurs when the magnetic cloud originated from Sun (known as Coronal Mass Ejection (CME)) interacts with the Earth's magnetosphere.
- The model may be utilized as a reference model in the ionospheric predictions and has potential applications in calculating the Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) positioning errors.

Significance of the model and the need for data on this:

The ionospheric variability is greatly influenced by both solar originated processes and the neutral atmosphere origin, and therefore, difficult to model.

Scientists have tried to model the ionosphere using theoretical and empirical techniques; however, the accurate prediction of electron density is still a challenging task.

Tracking the variability of the Ionosphere is important for communication and navigation.

Sources: pib.

6. First merger of two black holes with unequal masses detected

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: About blackholes, LIGO and theory of general relativity, and gravitational waves.

Context: The **gravitational wave observatories at LIGO** scientific collaboration have detected **a merger of two unequal-mass black holes**. The event has been named as **GW190412**.

This is the first such observation involving two black holes of unequal masses coalescing.

Significance of the discovery:

This observation once again confirms **Einstein's theory of general relativity**, which predicts the existence of higher harmonics, i.e. gravitational waves at two or three times the fundamental frequency.

Difference between binary blackholes of equal masses and unequal masses:

Dominant emission of gravitational waves happens **at twice the orbital frequency of the binary blackholes of equal masses and is negligible**.

In binary blackholes with unequal masses, the emission happens at a frequency that is three times the orbital frequency.

Also, in the case of the merger of unequal black holes, **the spin of the more massive black hole can be determined from the extra features in the signal waveform**.

The spin of the heavier black hole plays a more prominent role in the dynamics of the binary. Hence, it leaves a stronger imprint on the waveform, making it easy to measure

What is a black hole?

A black hole is an object in space that is so dense and has such strong gravity that **no matter or light can escape its pull**. Because no light can escape, it is black and invisible.

- There's a boundary at the edge of a black hole called the event horizon, which is the point of no return — any light or matter that crosses that boundary is sucked into the black hole. It would need to travel faster than the speed of light to escape, which is impossible.
- Anything that crosses the event horizon is destined to fall to the very centre of the black hole and be squished into a single point with infinite density, called the singularity.

Link: <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/first-merger-of-two-black-holes-with-unequal-masses-detected/article31432887.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Awareness in the fields of IT, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

1. What is geofencing?

What to study?

For Prelims: Meaning, features and how it works?

For Mains: Significance, associated concerns.

Context: The centre has tested an application that triggers e-mails and SMS alerts to an authorised government agency if a person has jumped quarantine or escaped from isolation, based on the person's mobile phone's cell tower location. The “geo-fencing” is accurate by up to 300 m.

Background:

The States have been asked to seek the approval of their Home Secretaries under the provisions of **Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885**, for the specified mobile phone numbers to request the DoT to provide information by email or SMS in case of violation of “geo-fencing”.

What is geofencing?

It is a location-based service in which an app or other software uses GPS, RFID, Wi-Fi or cellular data to trigger a pre-programmed action when a mobile device or RFID tag enters or exits a virtual boundary set up around a geographical location, known as a **geofence**.

Depending on how a geofence is configured it can prompt mobile push notifications, trigger text messages or alerts, send targeted advertisements on social media, allow tracking on vehicle fleets, disable certain technology or deliver location-based marketing data.

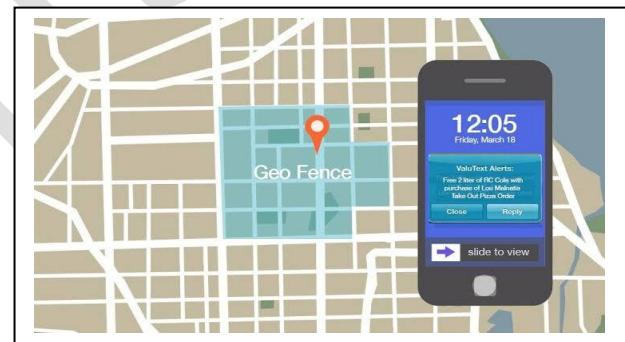
How geofencing works?

To make use of geofencing, an administrator or developer must first establish a virtual boundary around a specified location in GPS- or RFID-enabled software.

This virtual geofence will then trigger a response when an authorized device enters or exits that area, as specified by the administrator or developer.

Other applications of geofence:

1. Social networking.
2. Marketing.
3. Audience engagement.
4. Smart appliances.
5. Human Resource management.
6. Telematics.
7. Security.



Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. RFID GS WiFi.
2. GPRS vs GPS.
3. What is TRAI?
4. What is Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885?

Mains Link:

Discuss the significance of geofencing in the COVID 19 spread in India.

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/coronavirus-geo-fencing-app-will-be-used-to-locate-quarantine-violators/article31241055.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Bio fortified crops

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: Madhuban Gajar- features and significance.

Context: Biofortified carrot variety developed by farmer scientist benefits local farmers.

Details:

1. The bio fortified crop- **Madhuban Gajar** was developed by Shri Vallabhbhai Vasrambahai Marvaniya, a farmer scientist from Junagadh district, Gujarat.
2. It contains high β -carotene and iron content.
3. It is being planted in an area of over 200 hectares in Junagadh, and the average yield, which is 40-50 t/ha, has become the main source of income to the local farmers.
4. The variety is being cultivated in more than 1000 hectares of land in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh during the last three years.
5. Madhuban Gajar carrot variety possesses a significantly higher root yield (74.2 t/ha) and plant biomass (275 gm per plant) as compared to check variety.

What is biofortification?

Biofortification is the process of increasing nutritional value of food crops by increasing the density of vitamins and minerals in a crop through either conventional plant breeding; agronomic practices or biotechnology. Examples of these vitamins and minerals that can be increased through biofortification include provitamin A Carotenoids, zinc and iron.

How are crops fortified?

Conventional crop breeding techniques are used to identify varieties with particularly high concentration of desired nutrients. These are **cross-bred with varieties with other desirable traits from the target areas (such as virus resistance, drought tolerance, high yielding, taste) to develop biofortified varieties** that have high levels of micronutrients (for example, vitamin A, iron or zinc), in addition to other traits desired by farmers and consumers.

Agronomic biofortification entails application of minerals such as zinc or iron as foliar or soil applications, drawing on plant management, soil factors, and plant characteristics to get enhanced content of key micronutrients into the edible portion of the plant.

Why biofortification?

Biofortification is one solution among many interventions that are needed to solve the complex problem of micronutrient malnutrition. It is considered one of the most cost-effective interventions for countries to employ in combating micronutrient malnutrition.

- Biofortification reaches rural consumers who have limited access to industrially fortified foods, supplementation interventions, and diverse diets.
- Biofortification combines increased micronutrient content with preferred agronomic, quality, and market traits and therefore biofortified varieties will typically match or outperform the usual varieties that farmers grow and consume.

How does Biofortification differ from food fortification?

Biofortification has the increased nutritional micronutrient content imbedded in the crop being grown. Food fortification increases the nutritional value of foods by adding trace amounts of micronutrients to foods during processing.

Insta Link:**Prelims Link:**

1. Bio fortification vs Genetic modifications.
2. Micro vs Macronutrients.
3. Approval for Biofortified and GM crops in India.
4. GM crops allowed in India.

Mains Link:

What do you understand by fortification of foods? Discuss its advantages.

Sources: pib.

3. What is pool testing of Corona?

What to study?

For Prelims and Mains: What is it? How it is carried out? Significance and challenges?

Context: Stating that the number of COVID-19 cases in India is rising, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is now advising the feasibility of using **pooled samples for molecular testing of patient samples**.

The council has said that it is critical to increase the numbers of tests conducted by laboratories.

The advisory is aimed at increasing capacity of the laboratories to screen increased numbers of samples using molecular testing for COVID-19 for the purpose of surveillance.

How does it work?

A pooled testing algorithm involves the PCR screening of a specimen pool comprising multiple individual patient specimens, followed by individual testing (pool de-convolution) only if a pool screens positive.

As all individual samples in a negative pool are regarded as negative, it results in substantial cost savings when a large proportion of pools tests negative.

What the ICMR has recommended?

1. As per ICMR, preferable number of **samples to be pooled is five**, though more than two samples can be pooled, but considering higher possibility of missing positive samples with low viral load, it is strongly discouraged to pool more than five samples, except in research mode.
2. Also, the study has recommended that it should be **used only in areas with low prevalence of COVID-19** (initially using proxy of low positivity of less than 2% from the existing data).
3. In areas with positivity of 2-5%, sample pooling for PCR screening may be considered only in community survey or surveillance among asymptomatic individuals, strictly excluding pooling samples of individuals with known contact with confirmed cases and health care workers (in direct contact with care of COVID-19 patients).
4. Sample from such individuals should be directly tested without pooling.

Why we need pool testing?

- This will reduce the total test kits used to examine patients and treat them.
- It is also expected to trim the work at the laboratories testing these samples.
- International researchers suggest that pooling test samples is cost effective, especially for the countries with limited resources.
- It can be used to prevent community spread of the disease.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GEE7BGMJ2.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

4. Chitra GeneLAMP-N

What to study?

For Prelims: RT- LAMP- meaning, procedure, pros and cons.

For Mains: Significance of these testing kits for India.

What is it?

It is a diagnostic test kit that can confirm COVID19 in 2 hours at low cost.

It has been developed by **Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology**, Trivandrum, an Institute of National Importance, of the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

How it works?

The confirmatory diagnostic test detects the **N Gene of SARS- COV2** using **reverse transcriptase loop-mediated amplification of viral nucleic acid (RT-LAMP)**.

The test kit is highly **specific for SARS-CoV-2 N-gene** and can detect two regions of the gene, which will ensure that the test does not fail even if one region of the viral gene undergoes mutation during its current spread.

Significance:

1. The trial tests performed show that Chitra GeneLAMP- N has **100% accuracy and match with test results using RT-PCR.**
2. The detection time is 10 minutes, and the sample to result time (from RNA extraction in swab to RT-LAMP detection time) will be less than 2 hours.
3. A total of 30 samples can be tested in a single batch in a single machine allowing a large number of samples to be tested each day.



What is Reverse transcription loop-mediated isothermal amplification (RT-LAMP)?

It is a technique for the amplification of RNA. It is used in the detection of viruses.

In this method, a DNA copy of the viral RNA is generated by reverse transcriptase, and then isothermal amplification is carried out to increase the amount of total DNA.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. DNA vs RNA.
2. RT- LAMP vs RT- PCR.
3. What is reverse transcription?
4. What is Rapid antibody test?

Sources: pib.

5. Feluda and Crispr technology

What to study?

For Prelims: All about CRISPR technology and how it works?

For Mains: Recent developments, significance of the technology, concerns associated and ethical concerns associated.

What is Feluda?

- It is a low-cost, paper-strip test which can detect the new coronavirus within an hour.
- Developed by Scientists at the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research — Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB).
- It is expected to cost around Rs 500 against the RT-PCR test that costs Rs 4,500 in private labs.
- The test is based on a bacterial immune system protein called Cas9.
- It uses cutting-edge gene-editing tool Crispr-Cas9 system.

What are Genes and what is gene- editing?

Genes contain the bio-information that defines any individual. Physical attributes like height, skin or hair colour, more subtle features and even behavioural traits can be attributed to information encoded in the genetic material.

An ability to alter this information gives scientists the power to control some of these features.

What is CRISPR-Cas9?

CRISPR technology is basically a gene-editing technology that can be used for the purpose of altering genetic expression or changing the genome of an organism. The technology can be used for targeting specific stretches of an entire genetic code or editing the DNA at particular locations.

Significance:

CRISPR technology is a simple yet powerful tool for editing genomes. It allows researchers to easily alter DNA sequences and modify gene function. Its many potential applications include correcting genetic defects,

treating and preventing the spread of diseases and improving crops. However, its promise also raises ethical concerns.

How it works?

1. CRISPR-Cas9 technology behaves like a cut-and-paste mechanism on DNA strands that contain genetic information.
2. The specific location of the genetic codes that need to be changed, or “edited”, is identified on the DNA strand, and then, using the Cas9 protein, which acts like a pair of scissors, that location is cut off from the strand. A DNA strand, when broken, has a natural tendency to repair itself.
3. Scientists intervene during this auto-repair process, supplying the desired sequence of genetic codes that binds itself with the broken DNA strand.

Concerns and issues involved:

- Tampering with the genetic code in human beings is more contentious. Leading scientists in the field have for long been calling for a “global pause” on clinical applications of the technology in human beings, until internationally accepted protocols are developed.
- Studies highlighted that CRISPR-Cas9-edited cells might trigger cancer.
- May increase the risk of mutations elsewhere in the genome in those cells.
- Many things are not clear like how we should determine which disease or traits are appropriate for gene editing.
- **Ethical concerns:** In addition, there are concerns with manipulating human embryos for own interest.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

1. What are genes?
2. How are genes edited?
3. What is Crispr technology?
4. Difference between DNA and RNA.

Sources: pib.

6. Berberine and Alzheimer's

What to study?

For Prelims: About the disease, treatments, Berberine and Ber- D.

For Mains: Significance of the discovery.

What is Berberine?

Berberine is a natural and cheap product similar to curcumin, available commercially

It is **poorly soluble and toxic to cells**.

Why in News?

Scientists from Jawaharlal Nehru Centre For Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR) have modified the structure of Berberine into **Ber-D** to use as a Alzheimer's inhibitor.

Ber-D is a soluble (aqueous), antioxidant. It is a multifunctional inhibitor of multifaceted amyloid toxicity of Alzheimer's disease.

The structural attributes of Ber-D are such that **they prevent the generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and rescue biomacromolecules from oxidative damage**.

These attributes make Ber-D a promising candidate for developing effective therapeutics to treat **multifaceted toxicity of Alzheimer's disease**.

Background:

Alzheimer's disease is the most prevalent neurodegenerative disorder and accounts for more than 70% of all dementia. The **multifactorial nature of the disease attributed to multifaceted toxicity has made it difficult for researchers to develop effective medication**.

Protein aggregation and amyloid toxicity predominantly contribute to multifaceted toxicity observed in neuronal cells, including generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS), mitochondrial dysfunction, interfering with synaptic signaling, and activation of premature cell death.

What is Alzheimer's?

It is a progressive brain disorder that typically affects people older than 65. When it affects younger individuals, it is considered early onset.

The disease destroys brain cells and nerves, and disrupts the message-carrying neurotransmitters.

Eventually, a person with Alzheimer's loses the ability to perform day-to-day activities.

Symptoms include memory loss, difficulty in completing familiar tasks, confusion with time or place, problems in speaking and writing, decreased or poor judgment, and changes in mood and personality. Alzheimer's disease is also the most common cause of dementia — which is a syndrome and not a disease in itself, and whose symptoms include loss of memory, thinking skills, problems with language, changes in mood and deterioration in behaviour.

Treatment:

There is **no cure for Alzheimer's**, because its exact causes are not known. Most drugs being developed try to slow down or stop the progression of the disease.

There is a degree of consensus in the scientific community that Alzheimer's involves two proteins, called **beta amyloids and tau**. When levels of either protein reach abnormal levels in the brain, it leads to the formation of plaque, which gets deposited between neurons, damaging and disrupting nerve cells.

Most existing drugs for Alzheimer's try to target these proteins to manage some of the symptoms of Alzheimer's.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Conservation related issues, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

1. Anti-smog guns

What to study?

For Prelims: How anti smog guns work?

For Mains: Need for and significance, concerns associated with Delhi Air pollution.

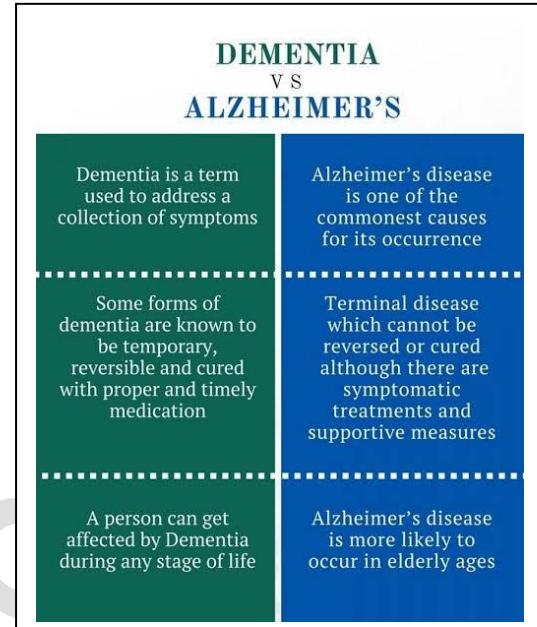
Context: Anti-smog guns installed at 14 large project sites in Delhi.

Background:

On January 13, the Supreme Court had said that anti-smog guns should be mandatory in projects that require environmental clearance from the State or Centre, and have a built-up area of over 20,000 square metres. As per this, 47 large projects in Delhi had to have these guns installed.

What is it?

- Anti-smog gun is a device that sprays nebulised water droplets into the atmosphere to reduce air pollution.
- Connected to a water tank and mounted on a vehicle, the device could be taken across the city to spray water to settle dust and other suspended particles.
- It can spray water up to a height of 50 metres and the results were positive as the spray acts like rain and settles dust particles and also PM 2.5.



Why we need such measures?

Delhi has been grappling with hazardous levels of pollution since late October, with the air quality dipping to "severe" category a few times.

Air pollution and the resulting smog is an outcome of three inputs – local emission of pollutants, emission transport from other states and regions, and meteorological factors like wind speed and temperature.

Need of the hour:

Fragmented policies and toothless environment bodies won't help. The centre and states will have to work jointly and quickly. Human lungs don't understand nuances of federalism and partisan politics.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GLF7ACF8M.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. Uranium Contamination in Ground Water

What to study?

For Prelims: Uranium and contamination, affected states.

For Mains: Effects, concerns and ways to prevent.

Context: A new study conducted by the University of Manchester, UK and Mahavir Cancer Institute and Research Centre, Phulwarisharif in Patna has found uranium contaminating the groundwater in 10 districts of Bihar.

Key findings:

- Supaul, Gopalganj, Siwan, Saran, Patna, Nalanda, Nawada, Aurangabad, Gaya and Jehanabad are the 10 districts.
- Uranium concentrations are elevated mostly in the North West-South East band along and to the east of Gandak river and running south of the Ganga river.
- The maximum uranium content was in Supaul, 80 microgram of uranium per litre of water.

What is the acceptable limit?

The **Indian Standard IS 10500: 2012 for Drinking Water specification** has specified the maximum acceptable limits for radioactive residues as alpha and beta emitters, values in excess of which render the water not suitable.

These requirements take into account all radioactive elements including uranium. No individual radioactive elements have been specifically identified.

As per Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS), maximum permissible limit of Uranium is 0.03 mg/l (as per WHO provisional guidelines) in all drinking water standards after following due process.

Affected states:

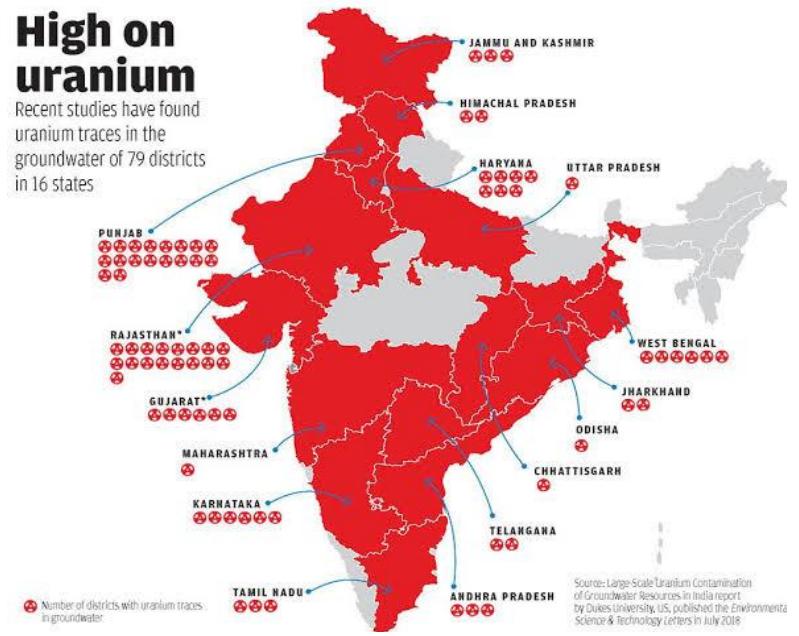
A report brought out by Duke University, USA in association with **Central Ground Water Board and State Ground Water departments** states that Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Jammu & Kashmir have localised occurrence of Uranium concentration.

Main factors responsible for uranium contamination:

1. Amount of uranium contained in an aquifer's rocks.
2. Water-rock interactions that cause the uranium to be extracted from those rocks.
3. Oxidation conditions that enhance the extracted uranium's solubility in water.
4. The interaction of the extracted uranium with other chemicals in the groundwater, such as bicarbonate, which can further enhance its solubility.
5. Human factors such as groundwater-table decline and nitrate pollution may be exacerbating the problem.

What needs to be done?

1. Revision of the current water quality monitoring program in India.
2. Evaluation of human health risks in areas of high uranium prevalence.
3. Development of adequate remediation technologies.
4. Implementation of preventive management practices to address this problem.
5. Including a uranium standard in the Bureau of Indian Standards' Drinking Water Specification based on uranium's kidney-harming effects.
6. Establishing monitoring systems to identify at-risk areas, and exploring new ways to prevent or treat uranium contamination.



What is Uranium?

1. Uranium is weakly radioactive and remains so because of its long physical half-life (4.468 billion years for uranium-238).
2. The biological half-life (the average time it takes for the human body to eliminate half the amount in the body) for uranium is about 15 days.
3. It is a naturally occurring element found in low levels within all rock, soil, and water.
4. This is **the highest-numbered element to be found naturally in significant quantities on earth**.
5. It is considered to be more plentiful than antimony, beryllium, cadmium, gold, mercury, silver, or tungsten.
6. It is about as abundant as tin, arsenic or molybdenum.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:

1. Radioactive vs non radioactive elements.
2. What is half life of an element? How is it measures?
3. Abundance of various elements in earth's crust.
4. How uranium contaminates ground water?
5. Uranium limits- BIS vs WHO.

Mains Link:

A recent report has highlighted uranium contamination in India's groundwater. Discuss the causes, its effects and ways to address the issue?

Link:

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/water/groundwater-in-10-bihar-districts-contaminated-by-uranium-study-70343>.

Sources: down to earth.

3. Fly ash

What to study?

For prelims: What is fly ash, how is it produced and where it can be used?

For mains: Concerns associated with its contamination, what needs to be done and legislative measures necessary.

Context: While 20 districts of Madhya Pradesh battle hard against the killer onslaught of the novel Coronavirus, the Singrauli district of the central Indian state has been hit by a tragedy caused by the Reliance Power plant's fly ash dyke collapse.

Background:

The Reliance Power's Ultra Mega Power Project's (UMPP) in Sasan area of Singrauli fly ash dyke collapsed recently. The flood of the toxic ash slurry from the collapsed dyke located in adjoining Harhawa village washed away six persons, including three kids, a woman and two men living in the adjoining villages.

What is Fly Ash?

Popularly known as Flue ash or pulverised fuel ash, it is a coal combustion product.

Composition:

- Composed of the particulates that are driven out of coal-fired boilers together with the flue gases.
- Depending upon the source and composition of the coal being burned, the components of fly ash vary considerably, but all fly ash includes substantial amounts of **silicon dioxide (SiO₂)**, **aluminium oxide (Al₂O₃)** and **calcium oxide (CaO)**, the main mineral compounds in coal-bearing rock strata.
- **Minor constituents include:** arsenic, beryllium, boron, cadmium, chromium, hexavalent chromium, cobalt, lead, manganese, mercury, molybdenum, selenium, strontium, thallium, and vanadium, along with very small concentrations of dioxins and PAH compounds. It also has unburnt carbon.

Health and environmental hazards:

Toxic heavy metals present: All the heavy metals found in fly ash nickel, cadmium, arsenic, chromium, lead, etc—are toxic in nature. They are minute, poisonous particles accumulate in the respiratory tract, and cause gradual poisoning.

Radiation: For an equal amount of electricity generated, fly ash contains a hundred times more radiation than nuclear waste secured via dry cask or water storage.

Water pollution: The breaching of ash dykes and consequent ash spills occur frequently in India, polluting a large number of water bodies.

Effects on environment: The destruction of mangroves, drastic reduction in crop yields, and the pollution of groundwater in the Rann of Kutch from the ash sludge of adjoining Coal power plants has been well documented.

However, fly ash can be used in the following ways:

- Concrete production, as a substitute material for Portland cement, sand.
- Fly-ash pellets which can replace normal aggregate in concrete mixture.
- Embankments and other structural fills.
- Cement clinker production – (as a substitute material for clay).
- Stabilization of soft soils.
- Road subbase construction.
- As aggregate substitute material (e.g. for brick production).
- Agricultural uses: soil amendment, fertilizer, cattle feeders, soil stabilization in stock feed yards, and agricultural stakes.
- Loose application on rivers to melt ice.
- Loose application on roads and parking lots for ice control.

The issues which impede its full-scale utilization in India:

1. Indian fly ash is primarily of the **calcareous or class C variety**, implying that it possesses not only pozzolanic, but also hydraulic (self-cementing) properties. In contrast, European fly ash is of a siliceous or class F variety, implying an absence of hydraulic properties.
2. The **pricing** of fly ash is increasingly becoming a contentious issue that is hampering its gainful utilisation.

3. **Imperfections typical of quasi-markets**, such as information asymmetry and high transaction costs, vested interests, technical and technological limitations, and the lack of regulatory oversight and political will, have impeded the flow of fly ash to its most value-adding use.

Link:

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/energy/fly-ash-dyke-breach-in-singrauli-points-to-a-bigger-problem-of-fly-ash-disposal-70389>.

Sources: down to earth.

4. NGT raises concern over COVID-19 bio-medical waste disposal

What to study?

For Prelims: Overview of Bio-Medical Waste Management Rules, 2016, about NGT.

For Mains: Concerns expressed by NGT, measures to address them.

Context: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has urged the State Pollution Control Board and Pollution Control Committee to put in serious efforts to mitigate possible risk of **unscientific disposal of the bio-medical waste arising out of the handling of the COVID-19 disease**.

What's the concern now?

There are concerns regarding unscientific disposal of bio-medical waste by unauthorised healthcare facilities. Only 1.1 lakh out of 2.7 lakh healthcare facilities are authorised under **the Bio-medical Waste Management Rules, 2016** so far.

What has the tribunal said?

1. There are gaps in compliance of **the Bio Medical Waste Management Rules, 2016** which are applicable to the disposal of the bio-medical waste generated out of handling a viral disease.
2. The State PCBS/PCCS have to make serious efforts to bridge the gap to mitigate possible risk in terms of unscientific disposal of bio-medical waste and enforce rule of law.
3. There is need for revision of **the guidelines for 'Handling, Treatment and Disposal of Waste Generated during Treatment, Diagnosis, Quarantine of COVID-19 Patients'** issued by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) recently.

Need of the hour:

1. All aspects of scientific disposal of liquid and solid waste management should be taken care of not only at institution level but also at individual levels, such as manner of disposal of used Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), used bags, gloves, goggles, without the same getting mixed with other municipal solid waste causing contamination.
2. **The effectiveness of the monitoring mechanism, including securing information should be reviewed** by way of electronic manifest system from the handlers of such waste and its online reporting by the State PCBS or PCCS by developing necessary software.
3. There is the **need to create awareness** by special awareness programmes, organising training in concerned local bodies, health departments, providing workers handling COVID-19 waste with adequate protective gear, adequate coordination with media and other concerned regulatory authorities.

Salient features of BMW Management Rules, 2016:

1. **The ambit of the rules** has been expanded to include vaccination camps, blood donation camps, surgical camps or any other healthcare activity.
2. It calls for **Phase-out the use of chlorinated plastic bags, gloves and blood bags within two years**.
3. It calls for **Pre-treatment of the laboratory waste, microbiological waste, blood samples and blood bags** through disinfection or sterilisation on-site.
4. It seeks to Provide **training to all its health care workers and immunise all health workers regularly**.
5. It seeks to Establish a **Bar-Code System for bags or containers containing bio-medical waste for disposal**.

6. As per the rules, **Bio-medical waste has been classified in to 4 categories** instead 10 to improve the segregation of waste at source.
7. As per the rules, **State Government shall provide land for setting up common bio-medical waste treatment and disposal facility.**

Link:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/states-uts-told-to-take-steps-to-mitigate-risks-in-waste-disposal/article31401274.ece>.

Sources: the Hindu.

5. Sujalam Sufalam Jal Sanchay Abhiyan

What to study?

For Prelims: Key features, goals and targets of the scheme.

For Mains: Need for and significance of the scheme.

Context: Amid the lockdown for the coronavirus outbreak, Gujarat government has given its the green signal for the third edition "Sujalam Sufalam Jal Sanchay Abhiyan", a conservation plan to deepen water bodies in the state before monsoon.

The scheme, which will continue till June 10, will see the deepening of lakes, check dams and rivers by removing silt, and it will be done with people's participation as well as under MNREGA.

Background:

The scheme was started in 2018 after a weak monsoon, and till date, the state's water storage capacity has increased by 23,000 lakh cubic feet due to deepening of lakes, check-dams, rivers and reservoirs.

About Sujalam Sufalam Jal Sanchay Abhiyan:

- Launched in 2018, the scheme aims to deepen water bodies in the state to increase storage of rainwater to be used during times of scarcity.
- It involves cleaning and desilting of riverfronts, sprucing up of Irrigation canals. It also involves deepening of lakes, tanks and reservoirs.
- The drive runs on a Public Private Partnership mode and contribution from the government shall remain 60% of the expenditure of the work while 40% share will be from people's contribution.

Sources: pib.

Topics: Disaster and management.

1. How India will tackle its water woes amid 'wash your hands' directive?

What to study?

For Prelims: Per capita availability of water in India, past trends and overview of jal Jeevan mission.

For Mains: Water scarcity in India, causes, impacts and ways to address them.

Why in News?

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) issued an advisory to state governments asking them to ensure safe drinking water supply and management during the nationwide lockdown that has been extended to May 3.

States have also been asked to send **field test kits** to villages to conduct periodic testing of water resources, and ensure round the clock vigils to ensure supply.

Why?

Frequent washing of hands with frothing soaps is recognized as the most efficient and effective measure in the listed preventive measures for controlling the spread of the virus.

Why ensuring uninterrupted water supply would be a challenge for many states in India?

Lack of access to clean water itself is an ongoing challenge that the country has been facing for several years.

The average **annual per capita water availability** fell from 1820 cubic meters assessed in 2001 to to 1545 cubic meters in 2011, and could reduce further to 1341 and 1140 in the years 2025 and 2050 respectively. Due to high temporal and spatial variation of precipitation, **the water availability of many region of the country is much below the national average and can be considered as water stressed/water scarce.** In a 2018 report, the water and sanitation advocacy group **WaterAid** ranked India at **the top of 10 countries with lowest access to clean water close to home**, with 16.3 crore people not having such access.

What are water stressed and water scarce conditions?

- Annual per-capita water availability of less than 1700 cubic meters is considered as water stressed condition.
- Annual per- capita water availability below 1000 cubic meters is considered as a water scarcity condition.

What are the challenges?

- Falling groundwater levels and frequent droughts.
- Increased demand from agriculture and industry.
- Pollution and poor water resource management.
- Challenges that will intensify as climate change contributes to more extreme weather shocks.
- As most of the rivers in the country are inter-State, the regulation and development of waters of these rivers, is a source of **inter-State differences and disputes**.

Water in the Constitution:

Under **Article 246**, the Indian Constitution allocates responsibilities of the States and the Centre into three lists— Union List, State List, and Concurrent List.

Water is under **Entry 17 of the State List**, which reads: “Water, that is to say, water supplies, irrigation and canals, drainage and embankments, water storage and water power subject to the provisions of **entry 56 of List I.**”

Steps need to be taken to ensure a more useful and productive discourse about water governance challenges:

1. Reconsider the **institutional processes** for dissemination of knowledge about water resource management.
2. Ensure an **adequate access to quality water, more so in urban areas where inequities over space and time are acute.**
3. The urban needs, which underpin much reporting on ‘water crises’, need to be met by **robust long-term planning and preparation for droughts and other contingencies.**
4. Cities need to **stop the destruction of local water bodies and local tree cover, treat its sewage properly, harvest rainwater, and stop straightening and concretizing the rivers and encroaching on their floodplain.**
5. There is an urgent need for coordination among users for **aquifers**. There should be laws and contracts for sharing of aquifers.
6. There should be a **River Basin Authority for sharing information** among states as most of the rivers in India pass through different states focusing on conservation.
7. **Charging money for efficient use of water** (as in case of electricity). For example- Water ATMS at Marathwada provide water @25 paisa per litre a day.
8. **Changing the cropping pattern, crop diversification and encouraging water use efficiency** in agriculture by moving towards food crops from cash crops.
9. Coordinated efforts among states for **management of ground water at a localized level.**
10. Encouraging **rain water harvesting, check dams.**

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-how-india-will-tackle-its-water-woes-amid-wash-your-hands-directive-6364877/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

Topics: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention

1. What is Round-tripping?

What to study?

For Prelims: What is GAAR? Meaning of round tripping?

For Mains: Concerns associated and ways to address them.

Context: In a major relief for New Delhi Television Limited (NDTV), the Supreme Court has quashed an income tax re-assessment notice issued by revenue authorities against the premier news broadcasting company.

What's the issue?

Income Tax department had accused NDTV of “round-tripping” finances in connection with a July 2007 issuance of step-up coupon bonds amounting to \$100 million through its U.K. subsidiary.

What is round tripping?

Round tripping refers to money that leaves the country through various channels and makes its way back into the country often as foreign investment. This mostly involves black money and is allegedly often used for stock price manipulation.

Round tripping is often done through a series of transactions that don't have any substantial commercial purposes, which makes it fall within the trappings of **GAAR**.

How does the money return to India?

It could be invested in offshore funds that in turn invest in Indian assets. The Global Depository Receipts (GDR) and Participatory Notes (P-Notes) are some of the other routes that have been used in the past.

Why round tripping happens?

There are a number of observed factors that promote round tripping.

Mainly, Tax concessions allowed in the foreign country encourages individuals to park money there and then reroute it.

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GM37AJQEG.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

Topics: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

1. Role of Armed forces in coronavirus outbreak battle

What to study?

For Prelims: Role of armed forces in such situations, procedure to call them and provisions in this regard.

For Mains: Need for and significance of their support.

Context: Army has moved in to take over the COVID-19 quarantine facility at Narela in Delhi. This has brought into focus the role of army in such situations, procedure to be followed and provisions in this regard.

What Armed Forces have done so far?

1. 6 quarantine facilities in Mumbai, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Hindon, Manesar and Chennai. 15 other facilities on standby, capacity of approximately 7,000.
2. 51 armed forces hospitals are preparing dedicated COVID-19 facilities including High Dependency Units (scaled-down version of an Intensive Care Unit), and ICU beds.
3. 5 testing labs at armed forces hospitals made part of national grid.
4. Six more hospitals to be equipped with the resources to begin COVID-19 testing.
5. Special IAF flights have evacuated people and carried medical supplies.
6. 60 tonnes of stores airlifted by IAF transport fleet has airlifted approximately to various parts of the country. Twenty-eight fixed wing and 21 helicopters are on standby.

- 6 Naval ships kept ready for assistance to neighbouring countries. Five medical teams also on standby for deployment in Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan.

So, what is the procedure for calling the armed forces to help the civil administration?

The procedure for requisitioning armed forces is governed under 'Aid to Civil Authorities' under the guidelines laid in Instructions on Aid to the Civil Authorities by the Armed Forces, 1970, Regulations for the Army and Manual of Indian Military Law.

- Civil administration requests the Local Military Authority for assistance, for the maintenance of law and order, maintenance of essential services, disaster relief and other types of assistance.
- Armed forces can be asked to provide troops and equipment for a flag march, rescue and relief, evacuation, and immediate aid.

Key facts:

- Providing aid to civil authorities, as and when called upon to do so, is a **secondary task for the armed forces**. It cannot replace the primary role of ensuring external security and operational preparedness.
- The **National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC)**, headed by the cabinet secretary, is the final authority to decide on the number of armed forces personnel that can be deployed to aid civil authority.

What are the tasks expected to be performed in checking the spread of COVID-19?

- Maintenance of law and order.
- Crowd control and curfew in sensitive areas.
- Evacuation of civilians from affected areas.
- Provision of essential supply of electricity and water.
- Restoration of essential services.
- Emergency feeding and shelter.
- Prevention of panic, prevention of theft and loot.
- Guarding quarantine locations and detention centres.
- Surveillance through drones aerial platforms.

Who pays for the costs incurred by the armed forces in these roles?

The **civil administration**. The cost of assistance provided by the Armed Forces is recovered in accordance with the instructions contained in Appendix 'H' to the Pamphlet 'Instructions on Aid to Civil Authorities by the Armed Forces 1970'.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:

- Composition of NCMC.
- Who can request armed forces aid?
- Who will decide the number of armed forces personnel that can be deployed to aid civil authority?
- Difference between primary and secondary task of armed forces.

Mains Link:

Discuss when the armed forces can provide aid to the civil authorities . What are the provisions governing?

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/indian-army-coronavirus-outbreak-role-procedures-requisition-6355513/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

GENERAL STUDIES – 4

1. How COVID-19 outbreak slipped through China's system?

Context: Nearly, 1 million are infected by COVID 19 across the world today. Though, the spread initially started in the month of December last year, until January 19, authorities in Wuhan maintained there was no proof of human-to-human transmission.

Studies suggest while China's January 23 lockdown of 50 million people averted an additional 7,00,000 cases outside Wuhan, interventions one week and three weeks earlier may have brought down the number by 66% and 95%, respectively.

What led to the disaster?

1. **Communication gap:** Every province, city and even district in China has its own **Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**, but these are subordinate to the health commission at every level so they do not directly report to the national level.
2. **Encroachment on freedom of speech:** Doctors were told that they could not speak about what was happening in Wuhan. This downplayed the severity of the situation.
3. **Spread of infection:** By the time the Wuhan province came under lockdown, as many as 5 million people had left.

Learning:

China finally came out in public on January 10 explaining the severity of the situation. Only it was too late for the world. If they had acted earlier, say by January 7, it may have been an entirely different equation. The most important lesson is **there has to be more transparency and an open environment for sharing and discussion.**

Link:

<https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=GSG7AGTRF.1&imageview=0>.

Sources: the Hindu.

2. What are human challenge trials, and why are they controversial?

Why in News?

Many people have volunteered to take part in a controversial testing method called human challenge trials. The method, which involves intentionally infecting volunteers with the novel coronavirus, is being promoted in order to “speed up” the process of preparing a vaccine.

- As of April 27, a global initiative called **1DaySooner** had registered 3,817 people in 52 countries who had signed up for such trials.

But, how are vaccines usually developed and tested?

In most regulatory regimes, vaccines take several years to develop, and their development typically proceeds through **three phases of clinical trials**.

1. In Phase 1, small groups of people receive the trial vaccine.
2. In Phase 2, the clinical study is expanded and the vaccine is given to people who have characteristics similar to those for whom the new vaccine is intended.
3. In Phase 3, the vaccine is given to several thousand people and tested for efficacy and safety. During this phase, participants either receive the vaccine or a placebo.

What are human challenge trials? How do they take place? Why is it significant?

In this, participants of the vaccine group and placebo group upon consent are **deliberately exposed to the infection** – thus are “**challenged**” by the disease organism.

- Such trials could save valuable time in developing a vaccine, as researchers would not have to wait for participants to contract the infection under real-world conditions.
- By replacing conventional Phase 3 testing of vaccine candidates, such trials may subtract many months from the licensure process, making efficacious vaccines available more quickly.

The ethical concerns:

While human challenge trials are not new, they are **usually carried out in developing medications for diseases which are considered less lethal and have been better understood by scientists over the years, such as malaria.**

Critics have questioned undertaking such trials for Covid-19, a potentially deadly disease for even those who are less at risk, and which researchers are still in the early stages of studying.

In 2016, even WHO has observed that **such research can appear to be in conflict with the guiding principle in medicine to do no harm.**

Need of the hour:

Well documented historical examples of human exposure studies would be considered unethical by current standards.

- It is essential that challenge studies be conducted within an ethical framework in which truly informed consent is given.
- When conducted, human challenge studies should be undertaken with abundant forethought, caution, and oversight.
- The value of the information to be gained should clearly justify the risks to human subjects. Information to be gained should clearly justify the risks to human subjects.

Link:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-what-rbis-rs-50000-crore-boost-means-for-mutual-funds-6381134/>.

Sources: Indian Express.

FACTS FOR PRELIMS

1. Bear bile:

- For treating severe and critical cases of COVID-19, Chinese government has recommended an injection of **Tan Re Qing**, which contains **bear bile**.
- The use of bear bile in Chinese medicine dates back at least 1,300 years. Bile is secreted by the liver and stored in the gall bladder.
- Bile from bears tends to be high in **ursodeoxycholic acid, also known as ursodiol**, which is helpful in dissolving gallstones and treating liver disease.

2. Sodium hypochlorite:

- Sodium hypochlorite is **commonly used as a bleaching agent, and also to sanitise swimming pools**.
- It releases **chlorine**, which is a disinfectant. Large quantities of chlorine can be harmful.
- At a much lower 0.25-0.5%, this chemical is used **to treat skin wounds** like cuts or scrapes. An even weaker solution (0.05%) is sometimes **used as a handwash**.
- It is **corrosive** and is meant largely to clean hard surfaces. It is not recommended to be used on human beings.
- A 1% solution can cause damage to the skin of anyone who comes in contact with it. If it gets inside the body, it can cause serious harm to lungs.

Why in News?

In Uttar Pradesh, migrant workers travelling to their home states, or their belongings, were sprayed with a disinfectant containing sodium hypochlorite, apparently to sanitise them.

3. Patriot air defence missiles:

Context: US recently deployed **Patriot air defence missiles to Iraq**.

Patriot (MIM-104) is a long-range, all-altitude, all-weather air defence system to counter tactical ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and advanced aircraft.

The missile is equipped with a **track-via-missile (TVM) guidance system**.

The **missile has a range of 70km and a maximum altitude greater than 24km**. The minimum flight time is less than nine seconds and the maximum is three and a half minutes.

4. Operation Sanjeevani:

An Indian Air Force (IAF) C-130J transport aircraft recently delivered 6.2 tonne of essential medicines and hospital consumables to Maldives under **Operation Sanjeevani**.

Among other things, these medicines include influenza vaccines, anti-viral drugs such as lopinavir and ritonavir — which have been used to treat patients with COVID-19 in other countries.



5. What is National Cadet Corps?

It is a youth development movement. It came into existence under the **National Cadet Corps Act XXXI of 1948**. It is a **Tri-Services Organization**, comprising the Army, Navy and Air Force, engaged in grooming the youth of the country into disciplined and patriotic citizens.

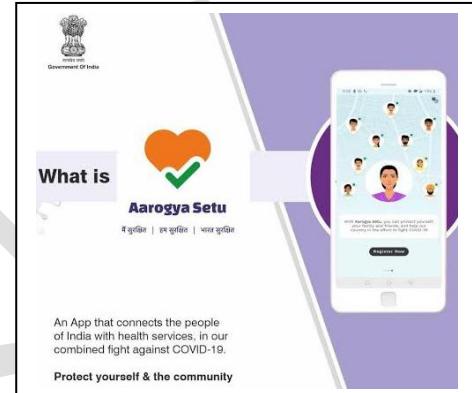
- The NCC provides exposure to the cadets in a wide range of activities., with a distinct emphasis on Social Services, Discipline and Adventure Training. The NCC is open to all regular students of schools and colleges on a voluntary basis. The students have no liability for active military service.

Why in News?

National Cadet Corps (NCC) has offered a helping hand to civilian authorities in the country's fight against COVID-19 by extending the services of cadets under '**Exercise NCC Yogdan**'.

6. AarogyaSetu:

- It is mobile app developed in public-private partnership to bring the people of India together in a resolute fight against COVID-19. The App joins Digital India for the health and well-being of every Indian.
- It will enable people to assess themselves the risk for their catching the Corona Virus infection.
- It will calculate this based on their interaction with others, using cutting edge Bluetooth technology, algorithms and artificial intelligence.



7. During India coronavirus lockdown, the laws that come into play (Relevant for both Prelims and Mains):

1. **Section 188 IPC** deals with those disobeying an order passed by a public servant, and provides for imprisonment ranging from one to six months. For those violating orders passed under the Epidemic Diseases Act, Section 188 IPC is the provision under which punishment is awarded.
2. **Section 51 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005** provides for punishment for two kinds of offences: obstructing any officer or employee of the government or person authorised by any disaster management authority for discharge of a function; and refusing to comply with any direction given by the authorities under the Act. Punishment can extend to one year on conviction, or two years if the refusal leads to loss of lives or any imminent danger.
3. **Section 505 IPC** provides for imprisonment of three years or fine, or both, for those who publish or circulate anything which is likely to cause fear or alarm. Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act provides for imprisonment, extending to one year, of those who make or circulate a false alarm or warning regarding a disaster or its severity or magnitude.
4. Under **Section 52, Disaster Management Act**, whoever makes a false claim for obtaining "any relief, assistance, repair, reconstruction or other benefits" from any official authority can be sentenced to a maximum of two years imprisonment and a fine will be imposed on the person.

8. IAS, IPS officers' associations form 'Caruna', an initiative to fight Coronavirus:

Associations representing officers of Central Civil Services, including the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS), have formed an initiative called '**Caruna**' to support and supplement the government's efforts in fighting coronavirus.

The acronym '**Caruna**' stands for **Civil Services Associations Reach to Support in Natural Disasters and represents a collaborative platform**, on which civil servants, industry leaders, NGO professionals and IT professionals among others have come together to contribute their time and abilities.

9. Delhi's '5T' war against virus:

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has announced a "5T plan" created by his government to contain COVID-19 spread in Delhi. **These five Ts are testing, tracing, treatment, teamwork and tracking-monitoring.**

10. Samadhan challenge:

The Innovation Cell of the Ministry of Human Resources Development and All India Council for Technical Education in collaboration with Forge and InnovatioCuris launched a **mega online challenge - SAMADHAN - to test the ability of students to innovate.**

The students participating in this challenge will search and develop such measures that can be made available to the government agencies, health services, hospitals and other services for quick solutions to the Coronavirus epidemic and other such calamities.

11. World Health Day:

- April 7 is observed as '**World Health Day**' worldwide. This was the day in 1948 when the World Health Organisation was founded.
- **The theme for the World Health Day 2020** is "Support Nurses and Midwives".

WHO chose the year 2020 as **the "Year of the Nurse and Midwife"** because of the contribution of nurses and midwives in making the world a healthier place.

12. About Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR):

ICCR was **founded in 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad**, Independent India's first Education Minister. It is an **autonomous organisation**.

ICCR has been assigned the responsibility of facilitating the celebration of **the International Day of Yoga by Indian Missions/Posts abroad since 2015**.

Objectives:

- To actively participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs pertaining to India's external cultural relations.
- To foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people, and to develop relations with nations.

13. Important awards by ICCR:

1. Distinguished Indologist Award.
2. World Sanskrit Award.
3. Gisela Bonn Award.

Why in News?

ICCR celebrated its 70th foundation day on April 9.

14. Gamosa:

Context: The COVID 19 pandemic has made the ubiquitous gamosa, a decorative cotton towel, evolve from memento to mask.

What is Gamosa?

The Gamosa is an article of significance for the people of Assam. It is generally a white rectangular piece of cloth with primarily a red border on three sides and red woven motifs on the fourth.

- **Assam has traditionally had two types of gamosas —** the **uka** or plain kind used to wipe sweat or dry the body after a bath, and the **phulam**, which is decorated with floral motifs to be gifted as a memento or during festivals such as Bihu.
- The gamosa's graph as a symbol of protest rose during the anti-foreigners Assam Agitation from 1979 to 1985. The extremist United Liberation Front of Assam too used the towel with "revolutionary" motifs.



15. Operation Shield to fight Covid-19:

Announced by **Delhi Government**.

- **SHIELD** stands for sealing, home quarantine, isolation and tracing, essential supply, local sanitation and door-to-door checks.
- It will be implemented in 21 localities identified as containment zones in Delhi.

16. Neighbouring rights law:

- It is mentioned in **Europe's new digital copyright law**.
- It is designed to ensure news publishers are compensated when their work is shown on websites, search engines and social media platforms.

Why in News?

France's competition regulator recently said that Google must start paying media groups for displaying their content, ordering it to begin negotiations after refusing for months to comply with Europe's new digital copyright law.

What has the Google said?

- Google, which effectively has a lock on internet searches in Europe, refused to comply, saying that articles, pictures and videos would be shown in search results only if media groups consent to let the tech giant use them at no cost.
- If they refuse, only a headline and a bare link to the content will appear, Google said, almost certainly resulting in a loss of visibility and potential ad revenue for the publisher.

17. What is Paralympics?

- Paralympics or a series of international multi-sport events involving athletes with a range of disabilities.
- They are organised in parallel with the Olympic games.

Eligibility: The **international Paralympic committee** has established 10 disability categories.

The categories are impaired muscle power, impaired passive range of movement, limb deficiency, leg length difference, short stature, hypertonia, ataxia, athetosis, vision impairment and intellectual impairment.

18. Bharat Padhe online:

Context: 'Bharat Padhe Online' campaign launched to invite ideas to improve online education ecosystem.

- The campaign aims to invite the best brains in the country to share suggestions/solutions directly with the HRD Ministry to overcome constraints of online education.
- Further educators across the country can also come forward to contribute with their expertise and experience in the field of education.

19. World Homoeopathy Day:

- Observed on **10th April 2020**.
- It commemorates the 265th birth anniversary of **Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of Homoeopathy**.
- **The theme of 2020 is** "Enhancing the scope of Homoeopathy in Public Health".

What is Homeopathy? The way to heal by the doctrine of 'similia similibus curantur' i.e. likes are cured by likes.

- The homeopathic medical system is a **recognized medical system in India under the Homoeopathy Central Council Act, 1973**. It is also recognized as one of the national systems of medicines.

20. Technology Development Board (TDB):

It is a **statutory body of the Department of Science and Technology (DST)**.

Established under **Technology Development Board Act, 1995**

It provides **financial support to Indian companies** for commercialization of indigenous technology or adaptation of imported technology.

21. About CAT:

The Central Administrative Tribunal was established by an Act of Parliament namely **Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985** as sequel to the **42nd amendment of the Constitution of India inserting Article 323 A**.

Functions: The tribunal adjudicates disputes and complaints with respect to Recruitment and Conditions of Service of the persons appointed to the Public Services and Posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or any State or of any other Local Authorities within the territory of India or under the control of the Government of India.

Composition: The Tribunal is headed by the Chairman and 65 Members, 33 from Judicial (including Chairman) and 33 from the Administrative stream. **The Chairman is normally a retired Chief Justice of a High Court.**

22. YUKTI portal:

YUKTI stands for **Young India Combating COVID with Knowledge, Technology and Innovation**.

The portal aims to monitor and record the efforts and initiatives of MHRD which have been taken in the wake of COVID-19.

23. What are Primordial Black Holes (PBH)?

- Primordial Black Holes (PBH) were formed during the Hot Big Bang phase.
- It is believed that they are formed as a result of collapsing radiations as opposed to the collapse of massive stars, which is the case of any other black holes.
- PBH can be massively large as 3000kms or be extremely tiny like nucleus of an atom.

24. What is a virosome?

Virosomes are **enveloped virus like particles**.

- They are **lipid-based carriers** (envelopes) containing the functional fusion viral proteins and natural membrane proteins of the natural virus.
- These lipid-based viral envelopes can be combined with additional rationally designed antigens and adjuvants for each specific vaccine or immunotherapies.
- Virosomes based vaccines are designed to **maintain the immunogenicity of a live-attenuated virus but with the safety of a killed virus**.
- The virosomes are **devoid of the nucleocapsid** and without the genetic material of the source virus, they are unable to replicate, cause an infection or a disease.

25. What is wormivet?

It is an **indigenous herbal medication (dewormer)**.

It was recently brought out by **National Innovation Foundation India (NIF)** in form of commercial product for livestock owners as an alternate to chemical method of treatment of worm.

26. Different festivals being celebrated in several parts of country- April 13 and 14:

1. **Vaisakhi**- Spring harvest festival celebrated by **Hindus and Sikhs**. The day marks the formation of **Khalsa Panth of warriors** under Guru Gobind Singh. It is celebrated as **the first day of the month of Vaisakha according to Hindu calendar**.
2. **Vishu**- It is a Malayali festival celebrated in the South Indian state of Kerala, Tulu Nadu region in Karnataka, bordering areas of Tamil Nadu and their diaspora communities. The festival marks **the first day of Medam, the ninth month in the solar calendar followed in Kerala**.
3. **Rongali Bihu**- Celebrated in Assam. It marks the beginning of the Assamese New Year.
4. **Naba Barsha**- Bengali New Year according to the Gregorian Calendar.
5. **Putrandu** - Tamil Nadu. It is celebrated on the first day of the Tamil month – Chithirai – and marks the beginning of the Tamil New Year.

27. Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF):

- The Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) was established in 2000 under an agreement between the Governments of India and United States of America.
- It has a mandate to promote, catalyze and seed bilateral collaboration in science, technology, engineering and biomedical research through substantive interaction amongst government, academia and industry.
- As an **autonomous, not-for-profit society**, IUSSTF has the ability, agility and flexibility to engage and involve industry, private R&D labs; and non governmental entities in its evolving activity manifold.
- This operational uniqueness allows the IUSSTF to receive grants and contributions from independent sources both in India and USA, besides the assured core funding from the two governments.
- **IUSSTF currently implements a portfolio of “four” broad program verticals** – Scientific Networks, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Research and Development and Visitation Programs.

28. Google Journalism Emergency Relief Fund:

- Google is planning to launch this emergency fund to help local news outlets struggling to maintain operations in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.
- Under this, Google would offer grants ranging from the "low thousands of dollars" for the smallest operations to "low tens of thousands for larger newsrooms."
- This financial support is for local newsrooms hit by the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of its Google News Initiative.

Need: The move comes with the media sector facing deep cutbacks resulting from the global consumer lockdown, an intense economic slump and a retrenchment in advertising revenues that many news outlets depend on.

29. Thrissur Pooram festival:

Context: Thrissur Pooram has been cancelled for the first time on account of the COVID-19 outbreak.

About the festival:

It is called **the 'mother of all festivals' in Kerala**.

The Pooram dates back to the late 18th century and was started by **Sakthan Thampuran, the Maharaja of the erstwhile Kochi state**.

30. MK 54 lightweight torpedo:

Context: US Department of State has approved a Foreign Military Sale to India of 16 MK 54 all round up **lightweight torpedoes**.

MK 54 lightweight torpedo was known as **the Lightweight Hybrid Torpedo (LHT)**. It weighs around 608 pounds, while its warhead weighs around 96.8 pounds and is highly explosive. These torpedoes are used by US surface ships, fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters and are their primary anti-submarine warfare weapon.

31. What is order books, inventories and capacity utilisation survey (OBICUS)?

- **Context:** The Reserve Bank of India has launched latest round of quarterly **order books, inventories and capacity utilisation survey (OBICUS) of manufacturing sector**. The survey provides valuable input for monetary policy formulation.
- The RBI has been conducting the OBICUS of the manufacturing sector on a quarterly basis since 2008.
- **The information collected in the survey includes** quantitative data on new orders received during the reference quarter, backlog of orders, pending orders, total inventories with a breakup between work-in-progress (WiP) and finished goods (FG) inventories and item-wise production.

32. Various pandemics and how have they influenced the course of human history?

Justinian Plague: Broke out in the sixth century in Egypt and spread fast to Constantinople, which was the capital of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire. The plague was named after the then Byzantine Emperor Justinian. The outbreak had killed up to 25 to 100 million people.

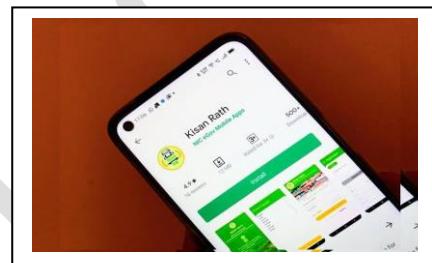
Black Death: The Black Death, or pestilence, hit Europe and Asia in the 14th century. It killed some 75 to 200 million people. Black Death led to improved wages for serfs and agricultural labourers. Land became more abundant relative to labour. It also led to the weakening of the Catholic Church.

Spanish Flu: Broke out during the last phase of the First World War. Germans and Austrians were affected so badly that the outbreak derailed their offensives.

33. KISAN RATH MOBILE APP:

Union Agriculture Ministry has launched **Kisan Rath Mobile App** to facilitate transportation of foodgrains and perishables during lockdown.

- The app is developed by **the National Informatics Centre** to facilitate farmers and traders in searching transport vehicles for movement of Agriculture and Horticulture produce.
- The App will also facilitates traders in transportation of perishable commodities by Refrigerated vehicles.



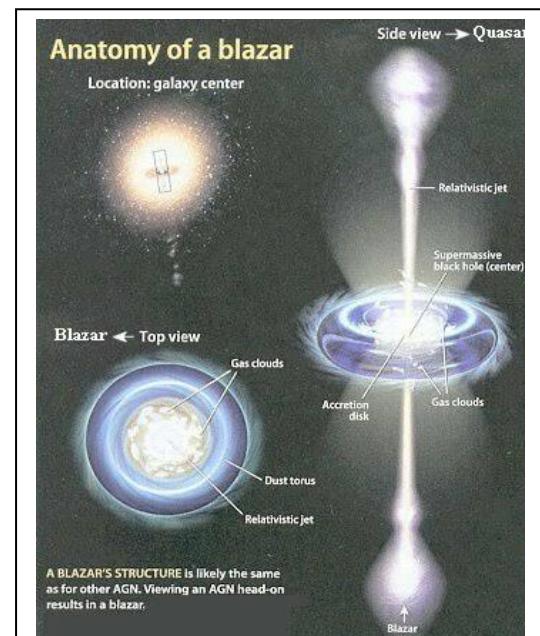
34. What is remdesivir?

It is a **drug with antiviral properties** that was manufactured by US-based biotechnology company in 2014, **to treat Ebola cases**. It was also tried in patients of MERS and SARS, both caused by members of the coronavirus family, but experts said it did not show promising results back then. It is now being studied as a COVID-19 treatment.

35. What are Blazars?

Blazars are among the **brightest objects in the universe** thanks to **emissions powered by supersized black holes**.

- The most distant of the newly discovered blazars started to emit their light when the universe was just 1.4 billion years old. Previously, the most distant blazars detected by Fermi emitted their light when the universe was about 2.1 billion years old.
- Blazars are similar to all active galaxies, acquiring energy from matter falling toward a central supermassive black hole. A small part of this infalling material becomes redirected into a pair of particle jets, which blast outward in opposite directions at nearly the speed of light.



36. Goa is now COVID free:

Goa has become the **first zero COVID-19 State in the country** with the last seven positive cases also turning negative.

This makes **Goa the first green State in the country with no case of coronavirus being reported since April 3.**

37. Bangalore Blue variety of grape:

- It is a variety of fox grape grown in districts around Bangalore.
- It is **one of the three major varieties of grape** in the state of Karnataka (the other two being Thomson seedless and Anab-E-Shahi Dilkush).
- It received a **geographical indication tag from the Government of India in 2013**.



38. What is “milk tea alliance”?

It is a pro-democratic front formed by thousands of internet users from Thailand, Taiwan and Hong Kong in social networks against the authoritarianism of the Chinese Government and its supporters.

The informal movement began by defending itself against the insults of pro-Chinese twitter users against Thailand. It has now ended up forming a social network group to combat Chinese “propaganda”.

39. West Texas Intermediate (WTI):

- West Texas intermediate (WTI), also known as Texas light sweet, is a grade of crude oil used as a benchmark in oil pricing.
- This grade is described as light crude oil because of its relatively low density, and sweet because of its low sulfur content.
- It is the underlying commodity of New York Mercantile Exchange's oil futures contracts.

Why in News?

US oil markets created history when prices of West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the best quality of crude oil in the world, fell to “minus” \$40.32 a barrel in New York. This is the lowest crude oil price ever known.

40. World Wide Help (WWH):

IIT Bombay has developed a platform named World Wide Help (WWH) which can be used to connect people seeking medical help with helpers, such as doctors.

How it works?

1. The WWH platform can be used with an app or a phone. The user simply calls a dedicated number and can input basic data such as the age of the person in need of help and whom they wish to solicit help from. They can supply the phone number, too.
2. This is registered as a task in the app and assigned to a primary helper who is a junior doctor or medicare professional. Further, the task may be re-designated by the primary helper to a senior doctor, who is the second level of helper.

41. Matterhorn:

- Matterhorn is a **mountain of the Alps**.
- It is situated in **the Pennine Alps on the border between Switzerland and Italy**.
- Its summit is 4,478 metres (14,692 ft) high, making it one of the highest summits in the Alps and Europe.
- The Matterhorn is mainly composed of gneisses from the Dent Blanche nappe, lying over ophiolites and sedimentary rocks of the Penninic nappes.
- Sometimes referred to as **the Mountain of Mountains, the Matterhorn has become an iconic emblem of the Alps in general**.



Why in News?

Indian Tricolour of more than 1,000 meters in size was projected on Matterhorn Mountain, Zermatt, Switzerland to express solidarity to all Indians in the fight against COVID-19.

42. Daporijo Bridge:

Context: The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has constructed the Daporijo bridge over Subansiri river in Arunachal Pradesh in a record span of just 27 days.

The bridge links roads leading upto the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China.

The Subansiri River is a tributary of the Brahmaputra River in the Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.

The Subansiri is the largest tributary of the Brahmaputra.

43. Earth Day:

It is an annual event, organized to show support for environmental protection around the world on **April 22**.

Earth Day was founded by **American senator Gaylord Nelson for environmental education**.

This day commenced on April 22, 1970. In the year 2020, **the 50th anniversary of the first Earth Day is being celebrated**.

The theme for Earth Day 2020 is **climate action**.

Earth Day Network (EDN) is the not for profit organisation that leads Earth Day worldwide.

44. Saiyam:

- It is a **mobile application developed by the Pune Municipal Corporation** under Smart Cities Mission to effectively track the home-quarantined citizens and ensure that they are staying in the home.
- The Mobile Application has GPS tracking so that whenever quarantined citizens leave their homes, City Administration gets alerted and the local ward or the local police station gets informed, who then visit the family.

45. World Book Day:

Also known as **World Book and Copyright Day, or International Day of the Book**, it is an annual event **organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to promote reading, publishing, and copyright**.

World Book Day was first celebrated on 23 April 1995.

On April 23, UNESCO will celebrate **the 25th edition of World Book and Copyright Day**.

46. CIVIL SERVICES DAY:

Observed on **21st April every year**.

Why 21st April? On this day in 1947, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel addressed the first batch of probationers at the All India Administrative Service Training School at Metcalfe House, New Delhi in 1947. In his speech he called **civil servants as the steel frame of India**.

Objective: To make civil servants re-dedicate themselves to the cause of the citizens and renew their commitment to public service.

On this day, **the 'Prime Minister Award for Excellence in Public Administration'** is given. The award is given in three categories, dividing the states and UTs into different categories. The award was instituted in 2006.

47. About Technology Development Board:

It is a **statutory body** established by **Technology Development Board Act, 1995**.

Objective: To promote development and commercialization of indigenous technology and adaptation of imported technology for much wider application.

Roles and functions of the board:

1. Encourage enterprises to take up technology-oriented products.
2. Provide equity capital or loans to industrial concerns and financial assistance to research and development institutions.

48. Sepsis:

- Sepsis occurs when chemicals released in the bloodstream to fight an infection trigger inflammation throughout the body. This can cause a cascade of changes that damage multiple organ systems, leading them to fail, sometimes even resulting in death.
- Symptoms include fever, difficulty breathing, low blood pressure, fast heart rate and mental confusion.

Why in News?

Sepsivac- the Drug for sepsis will be tested for COVID-19.

49. VIDYADAAN 2.0:

Launched by Union HRD Ministry, it is a **national program** for inviting e-learning Content contributions. VidyaDaan is conceptualised as a **common national program for individuals and organizations across the country to contribute e-learning resources** for both school and higher education to ensure continuity of quality learning.

The content will be used on the **DIKSHA app** to help millions of children across the country to continue their learning anytime and anywhere.

50. Kasowal Bridge:

It is a 484- metre long permanent **bridge on the river Ravi to connect the Kasowal enclave of Punjab along the Pakistan border to the rest of the country**.

Built by the **Borders Roads Organization**.

Kasowal enclave is around 35 square km. It was till now connected through a pontoon bridge of limited load capacity.

The enclave was **formed because it has the Ravi behind it and the International Border ahead of it**.

There are similar enclaves of Pakistani territory too, which lie ahead of Ravi and face Indian territory. These Pakistani enclaves — Dera Baba Nanak enclave and Jassar enclave — were occupied by the Indian Army in the 1965 and 1971 wars.

51. Education for Justice:

The Education for Justice (E4J) initiative was launched by **the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes** to teach next generation about crime prevention and address problems under law.

The initiative seeks **to prevent crime and promote a culture of lawfulness through education activities designed for primary, secondary and tertiary levels**.

The E4J initiative is under the **Global Programme for the Implementation of the Doha Declaration**.

52. Team Mask Force:

- It is a video Created by **BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India)**.
- It promotes the use of masks to fight the infectious disease COVID-19.
- The video featuring India's most revered cricketers urges fellow countrymen to join the team mask force and help the nation fight against the novel coronavirus.

53. Noor satellite:

It is a military satellite launched recently by **Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps — a branch of the country's armed forces**.

The satellite flew into orbit on top of a **multi-stage Qased rocket**.

54. Khongjom Day:

It is **celebrated in Manipur** every year on **April 23** to pay tribute to the war heroes of **Anglo-Manipuri War 1891** who had sacrificed their lives fighting against the British to protect freedom of Manipur.

55. What are deep nudes?

Deep nudes are **computer-generated images and videos**.

Cybercriminals use **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** software to **superimpose a digital composite** (assembling multiple media files to make a final one) **on to an existing video, photo or audio**.

Concerns: Because of how realistic deepfake images, audio and videos can be, the technology is vulnerable for use by cybercriminals who could spread misinformation to intimidate or blackmail people.

56. Panchayati Raj Diwas:

National Panchayati Raj Day is the national day of India celebrated by Ministry of Panchayati Raj on **24th April** annually.

Why on this day? The **Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992** came into force with effect from 24th April, 1993. It has institutionalized Panchayati Raj through the village, Intermediate and District level Panchayats.

57. Anthurium:

Anthurium is **one of the best domestic flowering plants in the world**. It purifies the surrounding air and remove harmful airborne chemicals like formaldehyde, ammonia, toluene, xylene, and allergens.

NASA has placed it in the list of air purifier plants.

Why in News?

D Vasini Bai, a women innovator from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, has developed 10 varieties of Anthurium.

National Innovation Foundation-India (NIF) has facilitated mass multiplication and large scale production of four highly demanded varieties through **tissue culture technique** at the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR), Bangalore, for the diffusion of the varieties in similar agro-climatic zones of the country.

58. e-GramSwaraj Portal and Mobile App:

Launched by the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj**.

It will provide the Gram Panchayats with a **single interface to prepare and implement their Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)**.

The portal will ensure real time monitoring and accountability.

59. Devanahalli Pomelo:

In a bid to revive and conserve '**Devanahalli Pomelo**', an endangered citrus fruit, the operators of Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru have started a plantation drive in the region as part of their flagship CSR Programme '**Namma Ooru**'.

Devanahalli Pomelo has a **Geographical Indication (GI) tag** as it is known for its sweet taste.

Also known by its scientific name **Citrus Maxima**, the tree's fruit is rich in Vitamin C. While each pomelo tree grows 24 inches per season, it can live from 50-150 years and reach a height of 25 feet.

60. Saudi Arabia abolishes flogging:

Saudi Arabia has abolished **flogging as a punishment for crime**.

- Now, with flogging abolished, judges will have to choose between fines, jail sentences and non-custodial alternatives such as jail sentences.
- This reform was made in order to "**bring the kingdom into line with international human rights norms against corporal punishment**".
- In 2018, Saudi had lifted the **ban on women drivers**. And, women not requiring permission from their **male guardians to apply for a passport anymore**.

61. Unified Geologic Map of the Moon:

It is **the first ever digital, unified, global, geological map of the moon**.

- It was released virtually by the **United States Geological Survey (USGS), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) and the Lunar Planetary Institute** on April 22, 2020.
- The map is a 'seamless, globally consistent, 1:5,000,000-scale geologic map'.

- It will serve as a **blueprint for future human missions and a source of research and analysis** for the educators and the general public interested in lunar geology.



62. Total Nobels for the Curie family:

The Curies have received a **total of four of Nobel prizes, the highest won by a single family.**

They also have **the unique distinction of having three Nobel-prize winning members in the family.**

- In 1903, **Marie Curie received the Nobel Prize in Physics** making her the world's first woman to win the prize. Curie shared the 1903 Nobel with her fellow researcher Pierre Curie and Becquerel for their **combined work on radioactivity**.
- In 1911, she created history again by becoming **the first woman to have won two Nobel awards**. The 1911 Nobel Prize in Chemistry was awarded to Marie after she managed to produce radium as a pure metal.
- The **1935 Nobel in Chemistry** went to Irène Curie and her husband and co-researcher Frédéric Joliot for their joint work on **the artificial creation of new radioactive elements**.

63. Rohtang Pass:

It is a high **mountain pass on the eastern Pir Panjal Range** of the Himalayas around 51 km (32 mi) from Manali.

- It connects the Kullu Valley with the Lahaul and Spiti Valleys of Himachal Pradesh, India.** Manali-Leh Highway, a part of NH 21, transverses Rohtang Pass.
- River Ravi rises west of the Rohtang pass in the Kullu Hills.

64. Yemen separatists declare self-rule in south:

- Separatists in southern Yemen have declared self-rule, breaking a peace deal signed in November with the internationally recognised government.
- The coalition consists of the UAE-backed separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the Saudi-backed government forces.
- Yemen has been devastated by a civil war between the Houthis and the government-backed coalition.



65. Pitch Black 2020:

- Australia's multilateral air combat training exercise, Pitch Black 2020** has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 situation.
- In the last edition of Pitch Black in 2018, the Indian Air Force (IAF) had for the first-time deployed fighter aircraft for the exercise.

- The multilateral air combat exercise provides a unique opportunity for exchange of knowledge and experience with forces across the globe in a dynamic warfare environment.

66. CERT-In:

CERT-In (**the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team**) is a government-mandated information technology (IT) security organization. CERT-In was **created by the Indian Department of Information Technology in 2004 and operates under the auspices of that department**.

It's purpose: The purpose of CERT-In is to respond to computer security incidents, report on vulnerabilities and promote effective IT security practices throughout the country. According to the provisions of the Information Technology Amendment Act 2008, CERT-In is responsible for overseeing administration of the Act.

67. Ruhdaar:

- It is a low-cost mechanical ventilator to fight against COVID19.
- Developed by IIT Bombay team.
- The cost of production of one ventilator is Rs 10,000.

68. Operation SHIELD

@CMODelhi

How containment takes place

Operation S.H.I.E.L.D.

दिल्ली सरकार
आप की सरकार

S Sealing of the immediate area or surroundings after geographical marking

H Home quarantine of all the people living in the area

I Isolation and Tracing of people who have been first and second contacts

E Essential Supply of commodities is ensured

L Local Sanitisation of the area by authorities

D Door 2 Door health checks of everyone living in the area

69. HCARD:

- It is a robot to assist frontline COVID-19 healthcare warriors.
- It helps in maintaining physical distance from those infected by coronavirus.
- Developed by Durgapur-based **CSIR lab, Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute**.
- This robot can be controlled and monitored by a nursing booth with a control station having such features as navigation, drawer activation for providing medicines and food to patients, sample collection and audio-visual communication.
- HCARD stands for **Hospital Care Assistive Robotic Device (HCARD)**.



70. What are Estrogen and progesterone?

Estrogen and progesterone are the **two main sex hormones that characterise a woman**.

- **Estrogen** helps her develop female physical features and also maintains her reproductive system.
- **Progesterone** is secreted by a temporary endocrine gland that the body produces during the second half of the menstrual cycle, and helps prepare the body for possible pregnancy after ovulation.

The **male body too has estrogen and produces progesterone**, both in smaller amounts.

71. Kerala govt brings out ordinance to enforce salary cut:

- The Kerala government will bring an ordinance to defer up to 25 per cent salaries of its employees after the High Court order barred it from taking a tougher cost-cutting measure during the coronavirus outbreak.
- The government has decided to come out with **Disaster and Public Emergency Special Provisions Act** which will give it the power to defer payment of salaries, up to 25 per cent of all state government employees.
- The provision in the Act says this can be done when a health emergency or a disaster strikes.

PIB one liner facts:

1. Present **Foreign Trade Policy (FTP)** which came into force on 1st April, 2015, is for 5 years and has validity upto 31st March, 2020. The Govt. has decided to continue relief under various export promotion schemes by granting extension of the existing Foreign Trade Policy by another one year i.e. up to 31st March, 2021.
2. **The Eight Core Industries comprise 40.27 per cent** of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
3. **Ministry of Tourism** has launched “Stranded in India”, a portal aimed to support foreign tourists. The portal aims to disseminate information to the foreign tourists stuck far away from their homeland amidst COVID-19 threats and Lock Down.
4. The **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)** is a **statutory Corporation** set up under an Act of Indian Parliament on 13 March 1963. **The objectives of NCDC** are planning and promoting programmes for production, processing, marketing, storage, export and import of agricultural produce etc.
5. **The Ministry of Civil Aviation** has launched “**Lifeline Udan**” flights for domestic and overseas movement of essential cargo. The objective is to ensure unhindered supply of medical products across the country.